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**NEKRASSOV'S WHO CAN BE  
HAPPY AND FREE IN RUSSIA?**







*Иван Кеняшев*

# WHO CAN BE HAPPY AND FREE IN RUSSIA?

BY  
NICHOLAS NEKRASSOV

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NICHOLAS ALEXFIEVITCH NEKRASSOV

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province of Podolia

November 22, 1821

Died, St Petersburg

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# NICHOLAS NEKRASSOV

## A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE

WESTERN EUROPE has only lately begun to explore the rich domain of Russian literature, and is not yet acquainted with all even of its greatest figures. Treasures of untold beauty and priceless value, which for many decades have been enlarging and elevating the Russian mind, still await discovery here. Who in England, for instance, has heard the names of Saltykov, Uspensky, or Nekrassov? Yet Saltykov is the greatest of Russian satirists; Uspensky the greatest story-writer of the lives of the Russian toiling masses; while Nekrassov, "the poet of the people's sorrow," whose muse "of grief and vengeance" has supremely dominated the minds of the Russian educated classes for the last half century, is the sole and rightful heir of his two great predecessors, Pushkin and Lermontov.

Russia is a country still largely mysterious to the denizen of Western Europe, and the Russian peasant, the *moujik*, an impenetrable riddle to him. Of all the great Russian writers not one has contributed more to the interpreta-

tion of the enigmatical soul of the *moujik* than Russia's great poet, Nekrassov, in his life-work the national epic, *Who can be Happy in Russia?*

There are few literate persons in Russia who do not know whole pages of this poem by heart. It will live as long as Russian literature exists; and its artistic value as an instrument for the depiction of Russian nature and the sou' of the Russian people can be compared only with that of the great epics of Homer with regard to the legendary life of ancient Greece.

Nekrassov seemed destined to dwell from his birth amid such surroundings as are necessary for the creation of a great national poet.

Nicholas Alexeievitch Nekrassov was the descendant of a noble family, which in former years had been very wealthy, but subsequently had lost the greater part of its estates. His father was an officer in the army, and in the course of his peregrinations from one end of the country to the other in the fulfilment of his military duties he became acquainted with a young Polish girl, the daughter of a wealthy Polish aristocrat. She was seventeen, a type of rare Polish beauty, and the handsome, dashing Russian officer at once fell madly in love with her. The parents of the girl, however, were horrified at the notion of marrying their daughter to a "Muscovite savage," and her father threatened her with his curse if ever again she held communication with her lover. So the matter was secretly arranged

between the two, and during a ball which the young Polish beauty was attending she suddenly disappeared. Outside the house the lover waited with his sledge. They sped away, and were married at the first church they reached.

The bride, with her father's curse upon her, passed straight from her sheltered existence in her luxurious home to all the unsparing rigours of Russian camp-life. Bred in an atmosphere of maternal tenderness and Polish refinement she had now to share the life of her rough, uncultured Russian husband, to content herself with the shallow society of the wives of the camp officers, and soon to be crushed by the knowledge that the man for whom she had sacrificed everything was not even faithful to her.

During their travels, in 1821, Nicholas Nekrassov the future poet was born, and three years later his father left military service and settled in his estate in the Yaroslav Province, on the banks of the great river Volga, and close to the Vladimirsky highway, famous in Russian history as the road along which, for centuries, chained convicts had been driven from European Russia to the mines in Siberia. The old park of the manor, with its seven rippling brooklets and mysterious shadowy linden avenues more than a century old, filled with a dreamy murmur at the slightest stir of the breeze, stretched down to the mighty Volga, along the banks of which, during the long summer days, were heard the piteous, panting songs of the *burlaki*, the barge-

towers, who drag the heavy, loaded barges up and down the river.

The rattling of the convicts' chains as they passed; the songs of the *burlaki*; the pale, sorrowful face of his mother as she walked alone in the linden avenues of the garden, often shedding tears over a letter she read, which was headed by a coronet and written in a fine, delicate hand; the spreading green fields, the broad mighty river, the deep blue skies of Russia,—such were the reminiscences which Nekrassov retained from his earliest childhood. He loved his sad young mother with a childish passion, and in after years he was wont to relate how jealous he had been of that letter<sup>1</sup> she read so often, which always seemed to fill her with a sorrow he could not understand, making her at moments even forget that he was near her.

The sight and knowledge of deep human suffering, framed in the sort voluptuous beauty of nature in central Russia, could not fail to sow the seed of future poetical powers in the soul of an emotional child. His mother, who had been bred on Shakespeare, Milton, and the other great poets and writers of the West,

<sup>1</sup> Many years later, after his mother's death, Nekrassov found this letter among her papers. It was a letter written to her by her own mother after her flight and subsequent marriage. It announced to her her father's curse, and was filled with sad and bitter reproaches: "To whom have you entrusted your fate? For what country have you abandoned Poland, your Motherland? You, whose hand was sought, a priceless gift, by princes, have chosen a savage, ignorant, uncultured . . . Forgive me, but my heart is bleeding . . ."

devoted her solitary life to the development of higher intellectual tendencies in her gifted little son. And from an early age he made attempts at verse. His mother has preserved for the world his first little poem, which he presented to her when he was seven years of age, with a little heading, roughly to the following effect .

My darling Mother, look at this,  
I did the best I could in it,  
Please read it through and tell me if  
You think there's any good in it.

The early life of the little Nekrassov was passed amid a series of contrasting pictures. His father, when he had abandoned his military calling and settled upon his estate, became the Chief of the district police. He would take his son Nicholas with him in his trap as he drove from village to village in the fulfilment of his new duties. The continual change of scenery during their frequent journeys along country roads, through forests and valleys, past meadows and rivers, the various types of people they met with, broadened and developed the mind of little Nekrassov, just as the mind of the child Ruskin was formed and expanded during his journeys with his father. But Ruskin's education lacked features with which young Nekrassov on his journeys soon became familiar. While acquiring knowledge of life and accumulating impressions of the beauties of nature, Nekrassov listened, perforce, to the brutal, blustering

speeches addressed by his father to the helpless, trembling peasants, and witnessed the cruel, degrading corporal punishments he inflicted upon them, while his eyes were speedily opened to his father's addiction to drinking, gambling, and debauchery. These experiences would most certainly have demoralised and depraved his childish mind had it not been for the powerful influence the refined and cultured mother had from the first exercised upon her son. The contrast between his parents was so startling that it could not fail to awaken the better side of the child's nature, and to imbue him with pure and healthy notions of the truer and higher ideals of humanity. In his poetical works of later years Nekrassov repeatedly returns to and dwells upon the memory of the sorrowful, sweet image of his mother. The gentle, beautiful lady, with her wealth of golden hair, with an expression of divine tenderness in her blue eyes and of infinite suffering upon her sensitive lips, remained for ever her son's ideal of womanhood. Later on during years of manhood, in moments of the deepest moral suffering and despondency, it was always of her that he thought, her tenderness and spiritual consolation he recalled and for which he craved.

When Nekrassov was eleven years of age his father one day drove him to the town nearest their estate and placed him in the local grammar-school. Here he remained for six years, gradually, though without distinction, passing upwards from one class to another,



devoting a moderate amount of time to school studies and much energy to the writing of poetry, mostly of a satirical nature, in which his teachers figured with unfortunate conspicuousity.

One day a copy-book containing the most biting of these productions fell into the hands of the headmaster, and young Nekrassov was summarily ejected from the school.

His angry father, deciding in his own mind that the boy was good for nothing, despatched him to St. Petersburg to embark upon a military career. The seventeen-year-old boy arrived in the capital with a copy-book of his poems and a few roubles in his pocket, and with a letter of introduction to an influential general. He was filled with good intentions and fully prepared to obey his father's orders, but before he had taken the final step of entering the nobleman's regiment he met a young student, a former school-mate, who captivated his imagination by glowing descriptions of the marvellous sciences to be studied in the university, and the surpassing interest of student life. The impressionable boy decided to abandon the idea of his military career, and to prepare for his matriculation in the university. He wrote to his father to this effect, and received the stern and laconic reply :

"If you disobey me, not another farthing shall you receive from me."

The youth had made his mind up, however, and entered the university as an unmatriculated student. And that was the beginning

of his long acquaintance with the hardships of poverty.

"For three years," said Nekrassov in after life, "I was hungry all day, and every day. It was not only that I ate bad food and not enough of that, but some days I did not eat at all. I often went to a certain restaurant in the Morskaya, where one is allowed to read the paper without ordering food. You can hold the paper in front of you and nibble at a piece of bread behind it. . . ."

While sunk in this state of poverty, however, Nekrassov got into touch with some of the richest and most aristocratic families in St. Petersburg; for at that time there existed a complete comradeship and equality among the students, whether their budget consisted of a few farthings or unlimited wealth. Thus here again Nekrassov was given the opportunity of studying the contrasts of life.

For several years after his arrival in St. Petersburg the true gifts of the poet were denied expression. The young man was confronted with a terrible uphill fight to conquer the means of bare subsistence. He had no time to devote to the working out of his poems, and it would not have "paid" him. He was obliged to accept any literary job that was offered him, and to execute it with a promptitude necessitated by the requirements of his daily bill of fare. During the first years of his literary career he wrote an amazing number of prose reviews, essays, short stories, novels, comedies and tragedies, alphabets and children's stories, which, put together, would

fill thirty or forty volumes. He also issued a volume of his early poems, but he was so ashamed of them that he would not put his name upon the fly-leaf. Soon, however, his poems, "On the Road" and "My Motherland," attracted the attention of Byelinsky, when the young poet brought some of his work to show the great critic. With tears in his eyes Byelinsky embraced Nekrassov and said to him :

"Do you know that you are a poet, a true poet ?"

This decree of Byelinsky brought fame to Nekrassov, for Byelinsky's word was law in Russia then, and his judgement was never known to fail. His approval gave Nekrassov the confidence he lacked, and he began to devote most of his time to poetry.

The epoch in which Nekrassov began his literary career in St Petersburg, the early forties of last century, was one of a great revival of idealism in Russia. The iron reaction of the then Emperor Nicholas I. made independent political activity an impossibility. But the horrible and degrading conditions of serfdom which existed at that time, and which cast a blight upon the energy and dignity of the Russian nation, nourished feelings of grief and indignation in the noblest minds of the educated classes, and, unable to struggle for their principles in the field of practical politics, they strove towards abstract idealism. They devoted their energies to philosophy, literature, and art. It was then that Tolstoy, Turgenieff, and Dostoyevsky

embarked upon their phenomenal careers in fiction. It was then that the impetuous essayist, Byelinsky, with his fiery and eloquent pen, taught the true meaning and objects of literature. Nekrassov soon joined the circles of literary people dominated by the spirit of Byelinsky, and he too drank at the fountain of idealism and imbibed the gospel of altruistic toil for his country and its people, that gospel of perfect citizenship expounded by Byelinsky, Granovsky, and their friends. It was at this period that his poetry became impregnated with the sadness which, later on, was embodied in the lines :

My verses ! Living witnesses of tears  
Shed for the world, and born  
In moments of the soul's dire agony,  
Unheeded and forlorn,  
Like waves that beat against the rocks,  
You plead to hearts that scorn.

Nekrassov's material conditions meanwhile began to improve, and he actually developed business capacities, and soon the greatest writers of the time were contributing to the monthly review *Sovremennik* (the Contemporary) which Nekrassov bought in 1847. Turgenieff, Herzen, Byelinsky, Dostoyevsky gladly sent their works to him, and Nekrassov soon became the intellectual leader of his time. His influence became enormous, but he had to cope with all the rigours of the censorship which had become almost insupportable in Russia, as the effect of the Tsar's fears aroused

by the events of the French Revolution of 1848.

Byelinsky died in that year from consumption in the very presence of the gendarmes who had come to arrest him for some literary offence. Dostoyevsky was seized, condemned to death, and when already on the scaffold, with the rope around his neck, reprieved and sent for life to the Siberian mines. The rigours still increased during the Crimean War, and it was only after the death of Nicholas I., the termination of the war, and the accession of the liberal Tsar, Alexander II., that Nekrassov and Russian literature in general began to breathe more freely. The decade which followed upon 1855 was one of the bright periods of Russian history. Serfdom was abolished and many great reforms were passed. It was then that Nekrassov's activity was at its height. His review *Sovremenik* was a stupendous success, and brought him great fame and wealth. During that year some of his finest poems appeared in it : "The Peasant Children," "Orina, the Mother of a Soldier," "The Gossips," "The Pedlars," "The Railway," and many others.

Nekrassov became the idol of Russia. The literary evenings at which he used to read his poems aloud were besieged by fervent devotees, and the most brilliant orations were addressed to him on all possible occasions. His greatest work, however, the national epic, *Who can be Happy in Russia?* was written towards the latter end of his life, between 1873 and 1877.

Here he suffered from the censor more

cruelly than ever. Long extracts from the poem were altogether forbidden, and only after his death it was allowed, in 1879, to appear in print more or less in its entirety.

When gripped in the throes of his last painful illness, and practically on his deathbed, he would still have found consolation in work, in the dictation of his poems. But even then his sufferings were aggravated by the harassing coercions of the censor. His last great poem was written on his deathbed, and the censor peremptorily forbade its publication. Nekrassov one day greeted his doctor with the following remark :

“ Now you see what our profession, literature, means. When I wrote my first lines they were hacked to pieces by the censor’s scissors—that was thirty-seven years ago; and now, when I am dying, and have written my last lines, I am again confronted by the scissors.”

For many months he lay in appalling suffering. His disease was the outcome, he declared, of the privations he had suffered in his youth. The whole of Russia seemed to be standing at his bedside, watching with anguish his terrible struggle with death. Hundreds of letters and telegrams arrived daily from every corner of the immense empire, and the dying poet, profoundly touched by these tokens of love and sympathy, said to the literary friends who visited him :

“ You see ! We wonder all our lives what our readers think of us, whether they love us

and are our friends. We learn in moments like this. . . .”

It was a bright, frosty December day when Nekrassov's coffin was carried to the grave on the shoulders of friends who had loved and admired him. The orations delivered above it were full of passionate emotion called forth by the knowledge that the speakers were expressing not only their own sentiments, but those of a whole nation.

Nekrassov is dead. But all over Russia young and old repeat and love his poetry, so full of tenderness and grief and pity for the Russian people and their endless woe. Quotations from the works of Nekrassov are as abundant and widely known in Russia as those from Shakespeare in England, and no work of his is so familiar and so widely quoted as the national epic, now presented to the English public, *Who can be Happy in Russia?*

DAVID SOSKICE.





## PROLOGUE

THE year doesn't matter,  
 The land's not important,  
 But seven good peasants  
 Once met on a high-road.  
 From Province "Hard-Battered,"  
 From District "Most Wretched,"  
 From "Destitute" Parish,  
 From neighbouring hamlet—  
 "Patched," "Barefoot," and "Shabby,"  
 "Bleak," "Burnt-Out," and "Hungry,"  
 From "Harvestless" also, 11  
 They met and disputed  
 Of who can, in Russia,  
 Be happy and free?

Luká said, "The pope," <sup>1</sup>  
 And Román, "The Pontyészchick," <sup>2</sup>  
 Demyán, "The official,"  
 "The round-kellied merchant,"  
 Said both brothers Goóbin,  
 Mitródor and Ívan. 20  
 Pakhóm, who'd been lost  
 In profoundest reflection,  
 Exclaimed, looking down

<sup>1</sup> Priest.

<sup>2</sup> Landowner.

At the earth, " 'Tis his Lordship,  
His most mighty Highness,  
The Tsar's Chief Adviser,"  
And Prov said, " The Tsar."

Like bulls are the peasants :  
Once folly is in them  
You cannot dislodge it 30  
Although you should beat them  
With stout wooden cudgels :  
They stick to their folly,  
And nothing can move them.  
They raised such a clamour  
That those who were passing  
Thought, " Surely the fellows  
Have found a great treasure  
And share it amongst them ! "

They all had set out 40  
On particular errands :  
The one to the blacksmith's,  
Another in haste  
To fetch Father Prokóffy  
To christen his baby.  
Pakhóm had some honey  
To sell in the market ;  
The two brothers Goóbin  
Were seeking a horse  
Which had strayed from their herd. 50

Long since should the peasants  
Have turned their steps homewards,  
But still in a row  
They are hurrying onwards

## PROLOGUE

31

As quickly as though  
The grey wolf were behind them.  
Still further, still faster  
They hasten, contending.  
Each shouts, nothing hearing,  
And time does not wait. 60  
In quarrel they mark not  
The fiery-red sunset  
Which blazes in Heaven  
As evening is falling,  
And all through the night  
They would surely have wandered  
If not for the woman,  
The pox-pitted "Blank-wits,"  
Who met them and cried :

"Heh, God-fearing peasants, 70  
Pray, what is your mission ?  
What seek ye abroad  
In the blackness of midnight ?"

So shrilled the hag, mocking,  
And shrieking with laughter  
She slashed at her horses  
And galloped away.

The peasants are startled,  
Stand still, in confusion,  
Since long night has fallen, 80  
The numberless stars  
Cluster bright in the heavens,  
The moon gliding onwards.  
Black shadows are spread  
On the road stretched before

## PROLOGUE

The impetuous walkers.  
 Oh, shadows, black shadows,  
 Say, who can outrun you,  
 Or who can escape you ?  
 Yet no one can catch you, 90  
 Entice, or embrace you !

Pakhóm, the old fellow,  
 Gazed long at the wood,  
 At the sky, at the roadway,  
 Gazed, silently searching  
 His brain for some counsel,  
 And then spake in this wise :  
 " Well, well, the wood-devil  
 Has finely bewitched us !  
 We've wandered at least 100  
 Thirty versts from our homes.  
 We are too weary  
 To think of returning  
 To-night ; we must wait  
 Till the sun rise to-morrow."

Thus, blaming the devil,  
 The peasants make ready  
 To sleep by the roadside.  
 They light a large fire,  
 And collecting some farthings 110  
 Send two of their number  
 To buy them some vodka,  
 The rest cutting cups  
 From the bark of a birch-tree.  
 The vodka's provided,  
 Black bread, too, besides,  
 And they all begin feasting :  
 Each munches some bread

## PROLOGUE

5

And drinks three cups of vodka—  
 But then comes the quesuon 120  
 Of who can, in Russia,  
 Be happy and free ?

Luká cries, " The pope ! "  
 And Román, " The Pomyéshchick ! "  
 And Prov shouts, " The Tsar ! "  
 And Demyán, " The official ! "  
 " The round-bellied merchant ! "  
 Bawl both brothers Goóbin,  
 Mitrédor and Ívan.  
 Pakhóm shrieks, " His Lordship, 130  
 His most mighty Highness,  
 The Tsar's Chief Adviser ! "

The obstinate peasants  
 Grow more and more heated,  
 Cry louder and louder,  
 Swear hard at each other ;  
 I really believe  
 They'll attack one another !  
 Look ! now they are fighting !  
 Román and Pakhóm close, 140  
 Demyán clouts Luká,  
 While the two brothers Goóbin  
 Are drubbing fat Prov,  
 And they all shout together.  
 Then wake the clear echo,  
 Runs hither and thither,  
 Runs calling and mocking  
 As if to encourage  
 The wrath of the peasants.  
 The trees of the forest 150  
 Throw furious words back :

“ The Tsar ! ” The Pomyéshchick ! ”

“ The pope ! ” ‘ The official ! ”

Until the whole coprice

Awakes in confusion ;

The birds and the insects,

The swift-footed beasts

And the low crawling reptiles

Are chattering and buzzing

And stirring all round.

150

The timid grey hare

Springing out of the bushes

Speeds startled away ;

The noarse little jackdaw

Flies off to the top

Of a birch-tree, and raises

A harsh, grating shriek,

A most horrible clamour.

A weak little peewit

Falls headlong in terror

170

From out of its nest,

And the mother comes flying

In search of her fledgeling.

She twitters in anguish.

Alas ! she can't find it.

The crusty old cuckoo

Awakes and bethinks him

To call to a neighbour :

Ten times he commences

And gets out of tune

180

But he won't give it up . . .

Call, call, little cuckoo,

For all the young cornfields

Will shoot into ear soon,

And then it will choke you—

## PROLOGUE

7

The ripe golden grain,  
And your day will be ended !<sup>1</sup>

From out the dark forest  
Fly seven brown owls,  
And on seven tall pine-trees 190  
They settle themselves  
To enjoy the disturbance.  
They laugh—birds of night—  
And their huge yellow eyes gleam  
Like fourteen wax candles.  
The raven—the wise one—  
Sits perched on a tree  
In the light of the fire,  
Praying hard to the devil  
That one of the wranglers. 200  
At least, should be beaten  
To death in the tumult.  
A cow with a bell  
Which had strayed from its fellows  
The evening before,  
Upon hearing men's voices  
Comes out of the forest  
And into the firelight,  
And fixing its eyes,  
Large and sad, on the peasants, 210  
Stands listening in silence  
Some time to their raving,  
And then begins mooing,  
Most heartily moos.  
The silly cow moos,  
The jackdaw is screeching,  
The turbulent peasants

<sup>1</sup> The peasants assert that the cuckoo chokes himself  
with young ears of corn

## PROLOGUE

Still shout, and the echo  
 Maliciously mocks them—  
 The impudent echo 220  
 Who cares but for mocking  
 And teasing good people.  
 For scaring old women  
 And innocent children :  
 Though no man has seen it  
 We've all of us heard it ;  
 It lives—without body ;  
 It speaks—without tongue.

The pretty white owl  
 Called the Duchess of Moscow 230  
 Comes plunging about  
 In the midst of the peasants,  
 Now circling above them,  
 Now striking the bushes  
 And earth with her body.  
 And even the fox, too,  
 The cunning old creature,  
 With woman's determined  
 And deep curiosity,  
 Creeps to the firelight 240  
 And stealthily listens ;  
 At last, quite bewildered,  
 She goes ; she is thinking,  
 " The devil himself  
 Would be puzzled, I know ! "

And really the wranglers  
 Themselves have forgotten  
 The cause of the strife.  
 But after awhile  
 Having pummelled each other 250



Sufficiently soundly,  
 They come to their senses ;  
 They drink from a rain-pool  
 And wash themselves also,  
 And then they feel sleepy.  
 And, meanwhile, the peewit,  
 The poor little fledgeling,  
 With short hops and flights  
 Had come fluttering towards them.  
 Pa'hóm took it up 260  
 In his palm, held it gently  
 Stretched out to the firelight,  
 And looked at it, saying,  
 " You are but a mite,  
 Yet how sharp is your claw ;  
 If I breathed on you once  
 You'd be blown to a distance,  
 And if I should sneeze  
 You would straightway be wafted  
 Right into the flames. 270  
 One flick from my finger  
 Would kill you entirely.  
 Yet you are more powerful,  
 More free than the peasant :  
 Your wings will grow stronger,  
 And then, little birdie,  
 You'll fly where it please you.  
 Come, give us your wings, now,  
 You frail little creature,  
 And we will go flying 280  
 All over the Empire,  
 To seek and inquire,  
 To search and discover  
 The man who in Russia—  
 Is happy and free."

" No wings would be needful  
 If we could be certain  
 Of bread every day ;  
 For then we could travel  
 On foot at our leisure," 290  
 Said Prov, of a sudden  
 Grown weary and sad.

" But not without vodka,  
 A bucket each morning,"  
 Cried both brothers Goóbin,  
 Mitródor and Ívan,  
 Who dearly loved vodka.

" Salt cucumbers, also,  
 Each morning a dozen ! "  
 The peasants cry, jesting. 300

" Sour qwass,<sup>1</sup> too, a jug  
 To refresh us at mid-day ! "

" A can of hot tea  
 Every night ! ' they say, laughing.

But while they were talking  
 The little bird's mother  
 Was flying and wheeling  
 In circles above them ;  
 She listened to all,  
 And descending just near them 310  
 She chirruped, and making  
 A brisk little movement  
 She said to Pakhóm

In a voice clear and human :  
 " Release my poor child  
 I will pay a great ransom."

<sup>1</sup> A kind of home-brewed cider.

“ And what is your offer : ”

“ A loaf each a day  
And a bucket of vodka,  
Salt cucumbers also, 320  
Each morning a dozen,  
At mid-day sour qwass  
And hot tea in the evening.”

“ And where, little bird,”  
Asked the two brothers Goóbin,  
“ And where will you find  
Food and drink for all seven ? ”

“ Yourselfs you will find it,  
But I will direct you  
To where you will find it.” 330  
“ Well, speak. We will listen.”

“ Go straight down the road,  
Count the poles until thirty :  
Then enter the forest  
And walk for a verst.  
By then you'll have come  
To a smooth little lawn  
With two pine-trees upon it  
Beneath these two pine-trees  
Lies buried a casket 340  
Which you must discover.  
The casket is magic,  
And in it there lies  
An enchanted white napkin.  
Whenever you wish it  
This napkin will serve you  
With food and with vodka :  
You need but say softly,  
‘ O napkin enchanted’,

Give food to the peasants ! ' 350  
 At once, at your bidding,  
 Through my intercession  
 The napkin will serve you.  
 And now, free my child."

" But wait. We are poor,  
 And we're thinking of making  
 A very long journey,"  
 Pakhóm said. " I notice  
 That you are a bird  
 Of remarkable talent. 360  
 So charm our old clothing  
 To keep it upon us."

" Our coats, that they fall not  
 In tatters," Román said.

" Our laputs,<sup>1</sup> that they too  
 May last the whole journey,"  
 Demyán next demanded.

" Our shirts, that the fleas  
 May not breed and annoy us,"  
 Luká added lastly. 370

The little bird answered,  
 " The magic white napkin  
 Will mend, wash, and dry for you.  
 Now free my child."

Pakhóm then spread open  
 His palm, wide and spacious,  
 Releasing the fledgeling,  
 Which fluttered away  
 To a hole in a pine-tree  
 The mother who followed it 380  
 Added, departing :

<sup>1</sup> *Laput* is peasants' footgear made of bark of saplings

“ But one thing remember :  
 Food, summon at pleasure  
 As much as you fancy,  
 But 'vodka, no more . . .  
 Than a bucket a day.  
 If once, even twice  
 You neglect my injunction  
 Your wish shall be granted ;  
 The third time, take warning :      390  
 Misfortune will follow.”

The peasants set off  
 In a file, down the road,  
 Count the poles until thirty  
 And enter the forest,  
 And, silently counting  
 Each footstep, they measure  
 A verst as directed.  
 They find the smooth lawn  
 With the pine-trees upon it,      400  
 They dig all together  
 And soon reach the casket ;  
 They open it—there lies  
 The magic white napkin !  
 They cry in a chorus,  
 “ O napkin enchanted,  
 Give food to the peasants ! ”

Look, look ! It's unfolding !  
 Two hands have come floating  
 From no one sees where ;      410  
 Place a bucket of vodka,  
 A large pile of bread  
 On the magic white napkin,  
 And dwindle away. “

“ The cucumbers, tea,  
 And sour qwass—where are they then ? ”  
 At once they appear !

The peasants unloosen  
 Their waistbelts, and gather  
 Around the white napkin 420  
 To hold a great banquet.  
 In joy, they embrace  
 One another, and promise  
 That never again  
 Will they beat one another  
 Without sound reflection,  
 But settle their quarrels  
 In reason and honour  
 As God has commanded ;  
 That nought shall persuade them 430  
 To turn <sup>their</sup> steps homewards  
 To kiss wives and children,  
 To see the old people,  
 Until they have settled  
 For once and forever  
 The subject of discord :  
 Until they've discovered  
 The man who, in Russia,  
 Is happy, and free

They swear to each other 440  
 To keep this, their promise,  
 And daybreak beholds them  
 Embosomed in slumber  
 As deep and as dreamless  
 As that of the dead.

# PART I

## CHAPTER I

### THE POPE <sup>1</sup>

THE broad sandy high-road  
With borders of birch-trees  
Winds sadly and drearily  
Into the distance ;  
On either hand running  
Low hills and young cornfields,  
Green pastures, and often—  
More often than any—  
Lands sterile and barren.  
And near to the rivers  
And ponds are the hamlets  
And villages standing—  
The old and the new ones.  
The forests and meadows  
And rivers of Russia  
Are lovely in springtime,  
But 'O you spring cornfields,  
Your growth thin and scanty  
Is painful to see.

10

<sup>1</sup> Priest. <sup>1</sup>





## THE POPE

17 >

The soldiers and beggars  
 They pass without speaking,  
 Not asking if happy  
 Or grievous their lot :  
 The soldier, we know,  
 Shaves his beard with a gimlet,  
 Has nothing but smoke  
 In the winter to warm him,— 60  
 What joy can be his ?

As evening is falling  
 Appears on the high-road  
 A pope in his cart.  
 The peasants uncover  
 Their heads, and draw up  
 In a line on the roadway,  
 Thus barring the passage  
 in front of the gelding.  
 The pope raised his head, 70  
 Looked inquiringly at them.

“ Fear not, we won’t harm you, ’  
 Luká said in answer.

(Luká was thick-bearded,  
 Was heavy and stolid,  
 Was obstinate, stupid,  
 And talkative too ;  
 He was like to the windmill  
 Which differs in one thrig  
 Alone from an eagle : 80  
 No matter how boldly  
 It waves its broad pinions  
 It rises no higher.)

“ We, orthodox peasants,  
 From District ‘ Most Wretched,’  
 From Province ‘ Hard Battered,’

From 'Destitute' Parish,  
 From neighbouring hamlets,  
 'Patched,' 'Barefoot,' and 'Shabby,'  
 'Bleak,' 'Burnt-Out' and 'Hungry,' 90  
 From 'Harvestless' also,  
 Are striving to settle  
 A thing of importance;  
 A trouble torments us,  
 It draws us away  
 From our wives and our children,  
 Away from our work,  
 Kills our appetites too.  
 Pray, give us your promise  
 To answer us truly, 100  
 Consulting your conscience  
 And searching your knowledge,  
 Not feigning nor mocking  
 The question we put you.  
 If not, we will go  
 Further on."

"I will promise  
 If you will but put me  
 A serious question  
 To answer it gravely, 110  
 With truth and with reason,  
 Not feigning nor mocking,  
 Amen!"

"We are grateful,  
 And this is our story:  
 We all had set out  
 On particular errands,  
 And met in the roadway.  
 Then one asked another:

## THE POPE

19

Who is he,—the man 120  
 Free and happy in Russia ?  
 And I said, 'The pope,'  
 And Román, 'The Pomyéshchick,'  
 And Prov said, 'The Tsar,'  
 And Demyán, 'The official';  
 'The round-bellied merchant,'  
 Said both brothers Goóbin,  
 Mitródor and Ívan;  
 Pakhóm said, 'His Lordship,  
 The Tsar's Chief Adviser.' 130

“ Like bulls are the peasants ;  
 Once folly is in them  
 You cannot dislodge it  
 Although you should beat them  
 With stout wooden cudgels,  
 They stick to their folly  
 And nothing can move them.  
 We argued and argued,  
 While arguing quarrelled,  
 While quarrelling fought, 140  
 Till at last we decided  
 That never again  
 Would we turn our steps homeward  
 To kiss wives and children,  
 To see the old people,  
 Until we have found  
 The reply to our question,  
 Until we've discovered  
 For once and forever  
 The man who, in Russia, 150  
 Is happy and free.  
 Then say, in God's truth,  
 Is the pope's life a sweet one ?

Would you, honoured father,  
Proclaim yourself happy ? ”

The pope in his cart  
Cast his eyes on the roadway,  
Fell thoughtful and answered :

“ Then, Christians, come, hear me :  
I will not complain 160  
Of the cross that I carry,  
But bear it in silence.  
I'll tell you my story,  
And you try to follow  
As well as you can.”

“ Begin.”

“ But first tell me  
The gifts you consider  
As true earthly welfare ;  
Peace, honour, and riches,— 170  
Is that so, my children ? ”

They answer, “ It is so.”

“ And now let us see, friends,  
What peace does the pope get ?  
In truth, then, I ought  
To begin from my childhood,  
For how does the son  
Of the pope gain his learning,  
And what is the price  
That he pays for the priesthood ? 180  
’Tis best to be silent.<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \*

<sup>1</sup> The lines of asterisks throughout the poem represent passages that were censored in the original

"Our roadways are poor  
 And our parishes large,  
 And the sick and the dying,  
 The new-born that call us,  
 Do not choose their season :  
 In harvest and hay-time,  
 In dark nights of autumn,  
 Through frosts in the winter, , ,  
 Through floods in the springtime, 190  
 Go—where they may call you.  
 You go without murmur,  
 If only the body  
 Need suffer alone !  
 But no,—every moment  
 The heart's deepest feelings  
 Are strained and tormented.  
 Believe me, my children,  
 Some things on this earth  
 One can never get used to : 200  
 No heart there exists  
 That can bear without anguish  
 The rattle of death,  
 The lament for the lost one,  
 The sorrow of orphans,  
 Amen ! Now you see, friends,  
 The peace that the pope gets."

Not long did the peasants  
 Stand thinking. They waited  
 To let the pope rest, 210  
 Then enquired with a bow :  
 "And what more will you tell us ?"  
 "Well, now let us see  
 If the pope is much honoured ;  
 And that, O my friends,

Is a delicate question—  
 I fear to offend you  
 But answer me, Christians,  
 Whom call you, 'The cursed  
 Stallion breed?' Can you tell me?"

The peasants stand silent 221  
 In painful confusion,  
 The pope, too, is silent

"Who is it you tremble  
 To meet in the roadway<sup>1</sup>  
 For fear of misfortune?"

The peasants stand shuffling  
 Their feet in confusion

"Of whom do you make  
 Little scandalous stories? 230  
 Of whom do you sing  
 Rhymes and songs most indecent?  
 The pope's honoured wife,  
 And his innocent daughters,  
 Come, how do you treat them?  
 At whom do you shout  
 Ho, ho, ho, in derision  
 When once you are past him?"

The peasants cast downwards,  
 Their eyes and keep silent, 240  
 The pope too is silent

<sup>1</sup> There is a superstition among the Russian peasants that it is an ill omen to meet the "pope" when going upon an errand

The peasants stand musing ,  
 The pope fans his face  
 With his hat, high and broad-rimmed,  
 And looks at the heavens

The cloudlets in springtime  
 Play round the great sun  
 Like small grandchildren frisking  
 Around a hale grandsire,  
 And now, on his right side 250  
 A bright little cloud  
 Has grown suddenly dismal,  
 Begins to shed tears  
 The grey thread is hanging  
 In rows to the earth,  
 While the red sun is laughing  
 And beaming upon it  
 Through torn fleecy clouds  
 Like a merry young girl  
 Peeping out from the corn 260  
 The cloud has moved nearer,  
 The rain begins here,  
 And the pope puts his hat on  
 But on the sun's right side  
 The joy and the brightness  
 Again are established  
 The rain is now ceasing  
 It stops altogether,  
 And God's wondrous miracle,  
 Long golden sunbeams 270  
 Are streaming from Heaven  
 In radiant splendour

\* \* \* \* \*  
 "It isn't our own fault,  
 It comes from our parents,"





The parish, they married,  
 Were baptiz'd within it,  
 To us they confessed,  
 And by us they were oul'd. 310  
 And if a Pomyéshchick  
 Should chance for some reason  
 To live in a city,  
 He cherished one longing,  
 To die in his birthplace ;  
 But did the Lord will it  
 That he should die suddenly  
 Far from the village,  
 An order was found  
 In his papers, most surely, 320  
 That he should be buried  
 At home with his fathers.  
 Then see—the black car  
 With the six mourning horses,—  
 The heirs are conveying  
 The dead to the graveyard ;  
 And think—what a lift  
 For the pope, and what feasting  
 All over the village !  
 But now that is ended, 330  
 Pomyéshchicks are scattered  
 Like Jews over Russia  
 And all foreign countries.  
 They seek not the honour  
 Of lying with fatners  
 And mothers together.  
 How many estates  
 Have passed into the pockets  
 Of rich speculators !  
 O you, bones so pamper'd 340  
 Of great Russian gentry,

Where are you not buried,  
 What far foreign graveyard  
 Do you not repose in ?

“ Myself from dissenters <sup>1</sup>  
 (A source of pope’s income)  
 I never take money,  
 I’ve never transgressed,  
 For I never had need to ,  
 Because in my parish 350  
 Two-thirds of the people  
 Are Orthodox churchmen  
 But districts there are  
 Where the whole population  
 Consists of dissenters—  
 Then how can the pope live ?

“ But all in this world  
 Is subjected to changes :  
 The laws which in old days  
 Applied to dissenters 360  
 Have now become milder ;  
 And that in itself  
 Is a check to pope’s income.  
 I’ve said the Pcnnyéshchicks  
 Are gone, and no longer  
 They seek to return  
 To the home of their childhood ;  
 And then of their ladies  
 (Rich, pious old women),  
 How many have left us 370  
 To live near the convents !

<sup>1</sup> Dissenters in Russia are subjected to numerous religious restrictions. Therefore they are obliged to bribe the local orthodox pope, in order that he should not denounce them to the police.

And nobody now  
 Gives the pope a new cassock  
 Or church-work embroidered.  
 He lives on, the peasarts,  
 Collects their brass farthings,  
 Their cakes on the feast-days,  
 At Easter their eggs.  
 The peasants are needy  
 Or they would give freely— 380  
 Themselves they have nothing,  
 And who can take gladly,  
 The peasant's last farthing?

" Their lands are so poor,  
 They are sand, moss, or boggy,  
 Their cattle half-famished,  
 Their crops yield but twofold;  
 And should Mother Earth  
 Chance at times to be kinder,  
 That too is misfortune : 390  
 The market is crowded,  
 They sell for a trifle  
 To pay off the taxes.  
 Again comes a bad crop—  
 Then pay for your oread  
 Three times higher than ever,  
 And sell all your cattle !  
 Now, pray to God, Christians,  
 For this year again  
 A great misery threatens : 400  
 We ought to have sown  
 For a long time already ;  
 But look you—the fields  
 Are all deluged and useless. . . .  
 O God, have Thou pity

And send a round <sup>1</sup> rainbow  
To shine in Thy heavens ! ”

Then taking his hat off  
He crossed himself thrice,  
And the peasants did likewise.

“ Our village is poor 411  
And the people are sickly,  
The women are sad  
And are scantily nourished,  
But pious and laborious ,  
God give them courage !  
Like slaves do they toil ;  
’Tis hard to lay hands  
On the fruits of such labour.

“ At times you are sent for 420  
To pray by the dying,  
But Death is not really  
The awful thing present,  
But rather the living—  
The family losing  
Their only support.  
You pray by the dead.  
Words of comfort you utter,  
To calm the bereaved ones ;  
And then the old mother 430  
Comes tottering towards you,  
And stretching her bony  
And toil-blistered hand out ;  
You feel your heart sicken,  
For there in the palm

<sup>1</sup> There is a Russian superstition that a round rainbow is sent as a sign of coming dry weather.

Lie the precious brass farthings !  
 Of course it is only  
 The price of your praying.  
 You take it, because  
 It is what you must live on ; 440  
 Your words of condolence  
 Are frozen, and blindly,  
 Like one deep insulted,  
 You make your way homeward.  
 Amer . . . ”

\* \* \* \* \*  
 The pope finished  
 His speech, and touched lightly  
 The back of the gelding.  
 The peasants make way,  
 And they bow to him deeply. 450  
 The cart moves on slowly,  
 Then six of the comrades  
 As though by agreement  
 Attack poor Luká  
 With indignant reproaches

“ Now, what have you got ?—  
 You great obstinate blockhead,  
 You log of the millage !  
 You too must needs argue ;  
 Pray what did you tell us ? 460  
 ‘ The popes live like princes,  
 The lords of the belfry,  
 Their palaces rising  
 As high as the heavens,  
 Their bells set a-chiming  
 All over God’s world.

“ ‘ Three years,’ you declared,  
 ‘ Did I work as pope’s servant.

It wasn't a life—  
 'Twas a strawberry, brethren ; 470  
 Pope's kasha <sup>1</sup> is made  
 And served up with fresh butter,  
 Pope's stchee <sup>1</sup> made with fish,  
 And pope's pie stuffed to bursting ;  
 The pope's wife is fat too,  
 And white the pope's daughter,  
 His horse like a barrel,  
 His bees are all swollen  
 And booming like church bells.'

" Well, there's your pope's life,— 480  
 There's your 'strawberry,' boaster !  
 For that you've been shouting  
 And making us quarrel  
 You limb of the Devil !  
 Pray us it because  
 Of your beard like a shovel  
 You think you're so clever ?  
 If so, let me tell you  
 The goat walked in Eden  
 With just such another 490  
 Before Father Adam,  
 And yet down to our time  
 The goat is considered  
 The greatest of duffers ! "

The culprit was silent,  
 Afraid of a beating ;  
 And he would have got it  
 Had not the pope's face  
 Turning sadly upon them,

<sup>1</sup> *Kasha* and *stchee* are two national dishes.

Looked over a hedge  
At a rise in the road. 500

## CHAPTER II

## THE VILLAGE FAIR

No wonder the peasants  
Dislike a wet spring-tide :  
The peasant needs greatly  
A spring warm and early.  
This year, though he howl  
Like a wolf, I'm afraid  
That the sun will not gladden  
The earth with his brightness.  
The clouds wander heavily,  
Dropping the rain down 10  
Like cows with full udders.  
The snow has departed,  
Yet no blade of grass,  
Not a tiny green leaflet,  
Is seen in the meadows.  
The earth has not ventured  
To don its new mantle  
Of brightest green velvet,  
But lies sad and bare  
Like a corpse without grave-clothes  
Beneath the dull heavens. 21  
One pities the peasant ;  
Still more, though, his cattle :  
For when they have eaten  
The scanty reserves  
Which remain from the winter,  
Their master will drive them

To graze in the meadows,  
 And what will they find 'here  
 But bare, inky blackness ? 30  
 Nor settled the weather  
 Until it was nearing  
 The feast of St. Nichol,  
 And then the poor cattle  
 Enjoyed the green pastures.

The day is a hot one,  
 The peasants are strolling  
 Along 'neath the birch-trees.  
 They say to each other,  
 " We passed through one village, 40  
 We passed through another,  
 And both were quite empty ,  
 To-day is a feast-day,  
 But where are the people ? "

They reach a large village ;  
 The street is deserted  
 Except for small children,  
 And inside the houses  
 Sit only the oldest  
 Of all the old women. 50  
 The wickets are fastened  
 Securely with padlocks ;  
 The padlock's a loyal  
 And vigilant watch-dog ;  
 It barks not, it bites not,  
 But no one can pass it.

They walk through the village  
 And see a clear mirror  
 Beset with green framework—  
 A pond full of water . 60



And over its surface  
 Are hovering swallows  
 And all kinds of insects ;  
 The gnats quick and merge  
 Skip over the water  
 As though on dry land ;  
 And in the laburnums  
 Which grow on the banksides  
 The landrails are squeaking.

A raft made of tree-trunks 70  
 Floats near, and upon it  
 The pope's heavy daughter  
 Is yielding her beetle,  
 She looks like a hay-stack,  
 Unsound and dishevelled,  
 Her skirts gathered round her.  
 Upon the raft, near her,  
 A duck and some ducklings  
 Are sleeping together.

And hark ! from the water 80  
 The neigh of a horse comes ;  
 The peasants are startled,  
 They turn all together :  
 Two heads they see, moving  
 Along through the water—  
 The one is a peasant's,  
 A black head and curly,  
 In one ear an ear-ring  
 Which gleams in the sunlight ;  
 A horse's the other, 90  
 To which there is fastened  
 A rope of some yards length,  
 Held tight in the teeth

Of the peasant beside it.

The man swims, the horse swims ;

The horse neighs, the man neighs ;

They make a fine uproar !

The raft with the woman

And ducklings upon it

Is tossing and heaving.

100

The horse with the peasant

Astride has come panting

From out of the water,

The man with white body

And throat black with sunburn ;

The water is streaming

From horse and from rider.

“ Say, why is your village

So empty of people ?

Are all dead and buried ? ”

110

“ They’ve gone to Kousminsky ;

A fair’s being held there

Because it’s a saint’s day.”

“ How far is Kousminsky ? ”

“ Three versts, I should fancy.”

“ We’ll go to Kousminsky,”

The peasants decided,

And each to himself thought,

“ Perhaps we shall find there

The happy, the free one.”

120

The village Kousminsky

Is rich and commercial

And terribly dirty.

It’s built on a hill-side

And slopes down the valley,  
Then climbs again upwards,—  
So how could one ask of it  
Not to be dirty ? <sup>1</sup>

It boasts of two churches.  
The one is “dissenting,”

130

The other “Established.”  
The house with inscription,  
“The School-House,” is empty,  
In ruins and deserted ;

And near stands the barber’s,  
A hut with one window,  
From which hangs the sign-board  
Of “Barber and Bleeder.”

A dirty inn also  
There is, with its sign-board

140

Adorned by a picture :  
A great nosy tea-pot  
With plump little tea-cups  
Held out by a waiter,  
Suggesting a fat goose  
Surrounded by goslings.  
A row of small shops, too,  
There is in the village.

The peasants go straight  
To the market-place, find there

150

A large crowd of people  
And goods in profusion.  
How strange !—notwithstanding  
There’s no church procession  
The men have no hats on,

<sup>1</sup> The mud and water from the high lands on both sides descend and collect in the villages so situated, which are often nearly transformed into swamps during the rainy season.

Are standing bare-headed,  
 As though in the presence  
 Of some holy Image :  
 Look, how they're being swallowed—  
 The hoods of the peasants <sup>1</sup> 160

The beer-shop and tavern  
 Are both overflowing ;  
 All round are erected  
 Large tents by the roadside  
 For selling of vodka.  
 And though in each tent  
 There are five agile waiters,  
 All young and most active,  
 They find it quite hopeless  
 To try to get change right. 170  
 Just look how the peasants  
 Are stretching their hands out,  
 With hoods, shirts, and waistcoats !

Oh, you, thirst of Russia,  
 Unquenchable, endless  
 You are ! But the peasant,  
 When once he is sated,  
 Will soon get a new hood  
 At close of the fair. . . .

The spring sun is playing 180  
 On heads hot and drunken,  
 On boisterous revels,  
 On bright mixing colours ;  
 The men wear wide breeches  
 Of corduroy velvet,  
 With gaudy striped waistcoats

<sup>1</sup> On feast days the peasants often pawn their clothes  
 for drink

And shirts of all colours ;  
 The women wear scarlet ;  
 The girls' plaited tresses  
 Are decked with bright ribbons ; 190  
 They glide about proudly,  
 Like swans on the water.  
 Some beauties are even  
 Attired in the fashion  
 Of Petersburg ladies ;  
 Their dresses spread stiffly  
 On wide hoops around them ;  
 But tread on their skirts—,  
 They will turn and attack you,  
 Will gobble like turkeys ! 200

Blame rather the fashion  
 Which fastens upon you  
 Great fishermen's baskets !

A woman dissenter  
 Looks darkly upon them,  
 And whispers with malice :  
 " A famine, a famine  
 Most surely will blight us.  
 The young growths are sodden,  
 The floods unabated ; 210  
 Since women have taken  
 To red cotton dresses  
 The forests have withered,  
 And wheat—but no wonder ! "

" But why, little Mother,  
 Are red cotton dresses  
 To blame for the trouble ?  
 I don't understand you."  
 " The cotton is *French*,

And it's reddened in dog's blood !      220  
 D'you understand now ? ”

The peasants still linger  
 Some time in the market,  
 Then go further upward,  
 To where on the hill-side  
 Are piled ploughs and harrows,  
 With rakes, spades, and hatchets,  
 And all kinds of iron-ware,  
 And pliable wood  
 To make rims for the cart-wheels.      230  
 And, oh, what a hubbub  
 Of bargaining, swearing,  
 Of jesting and laughter !  
 And who could help laughing ?

A limp little peasant  
 Is bending and testing  
 The wood for the wheel-rims.  
 One piece does not please him ;  
 He takes up another  
 And bends it with effort ;      240  
 It suddenly straightens,  
 And whack !—strikes his forehead.  
 The man begins roaring,  
 Abusing the bull,  
 The cuffer, the block-head.  
 Another comes driving  
 A cart full of wood-ware,  
 As tipsy as can be ;  
 He turns it all over !  
 The axle is broken,      250  
 And, trying to mend it,  
 He smashes the hatchet.

He gazes upon it,  
Abusing, reproaching :  
“ A villain, a villain,  
You are—not a hatchet.  
You see, you can’t do me  
The least little service.  
The whole of your life  
You spend bowing before me,      260  
And yet you insult me ! ”

Our peasants determine ,  
To see the shop ‘windows,  
The handkerchiefs, ribbons,  
And stuffs of bright colour ;  
And near to the boot-shop  
Is fresh cause for laughter ;  
For here an old peasant  
Most eagerly bargains  
For small boots of goat-skin      270  
To give to his grandchild.  
He asks the price five times ;  
Again and again,  
He has turned them all over ;  
He finds they are faultless .

“ Well, Uncle, pay up now,  
Or else be off quickly.”  
The seller says sharply.  
But wait ! The old fellow  
Still gazes, and fondles      280  
The tiny boots sof’ly,  
And then speaks in this wise :

“ My daughter won’t scold me,  
Her husband I’ll spit at,  
My wife—let her grumble—

I'll spit at my wife too.

It's her that I pity—

My poor little grandchild.

She cluing to my neck,

And she said, 'Little Grandfather, 290

Buy me a present.'

Her soft little ringlets

Were tickling my cheek,

And she kissed the old Grand-dad.

You wait, little bare-foot,

Wee spinning-top, wait then,

Some boots I will buy you,

Some boots made of goat-skin."

And then must old Vavil

Begin to boast grandly, 300

To promise a present

To old and to young.

But now his last farthing

Is swallowed in vodka,

And how can he dare

Show his eyes in the village ?

"My daughter won't scold me,

Her husband I'll spit at,

My wife—let her grumble—

I'll spit at my wife too. 310

It's her that I pity—

My poor little grandchild."

And then he commences

The story again

Of the poor little grandchild.

He's very dejected.

A crowd listens round him,

Not laughing, but troubled

At sight of his sorrow.



## THE VILLAGE FAIR

41

If they could have helped him      320  
With bread or by labour

They soon would have done so,  
But money is money,

And who has got tenpence  
To spare ? Then came forward

Pavlóosha Varénko,  
The "gentleman" nicknamed.

(His origin, past life,  
Or calling they knew not,  
But called him the 'Barin'. )      330

He listened with pleasure  
To talk and to jesting ;

His blouse, coat, and top-boots  
Were those of a peasant ;

He sang Russian folk-songs,  
Liked others to sing them,

And often was met with  
At taverns and inns.

He now rescued Vavil,  
And bought him the boots      340

To take home to his grandchild.

The old man fled blindly,  
But clasping them tightly,

Forgetting to thank him,  
Bewildered with joy.

The crowd was as pleased, too,  
As if had been given

To each one a ruble.

The peasants next visit

The picture and book stall ;      350  
The pedlars are buying

Their stock of small pictures,

And books for 'heir baskets  
To sell on the road.

" 'Tis generals, *you* want : "  
The merchant is saying

" Well, give us some generals ;  
But look—on your conscience—  
Now let them be real ones,  
Be fat and ferocious." 360

" Your notions are funny,"  
The merchant says, smiling ;  
" It isn't a question  
Of looks. . . . "

" Well, of what, then ?  
You want to deceive us,  
To palm off your rubbish,  
You swindling impostor !  
D'you think that the peasants  
Know one from another ? 370  
A shabby one—he wants  
An expert to sell him,  
But trust me to part with  
The fat and the fierce."

" You don't want officials ? "

" To Hell with officials ! "

However they took one  
Because he was cheap :  
A minister, striking  
In view of his stomach 380  
As round as a barrel,  
And seventeen medals.

The merchant is serving  
 With greatest politeness,  
 Displaying and praising,  
 With patience unyielding,—  
 A thief of the first-class  
 He is, come from Moscow.  
 Of Blucher he sells them  
 A hundred small pictures, 390  
 As many of Fótyi<sup>1</sup>  
 The archimandrite,  
 And of Sípko<sup>1</sup> the brigand ;  
 A book of the sayings  
 Of droll Balakreff,<sup>1</sup>  
 The “ English Milord,” too.  
 The books were put into  
 The packs of the pedlars ;  
 The pictures will travel  
 All over great Russia, 400  
 Until they find rest  
 On the wall of some peasant—  
 The devil knows why !

Oh, may it come quickly  
 The time when the peasant  
 Will make some distinction  
 Between book and book,  
 Between picture and picture ;  
 Will bring from the market,  
 Not picture of Blucher, 410  
 Not stupid “ Milord,”  
 But Belinsky and Gógol !  
 Oh, say, Russian people,  
 These names—have you heard them ?  
 They’re great. They were borne

<sup>1</sup> Well-known popular characters in Russia.

By your champions, who loved you,  
 Who strove in your cause,  
 'Tis *their* little portraits  
 Should hang in your houses !

“ I'd walk into Heaven 420  
 But can't find the doorway ! ”  
 Is suddenly shouted  
 By some merry blade.  
 “ What door do you want, man ? ”  
 “ The puppet-show, brothers ! ”  
 “ I'll show you the way ! ”

The puppet-show tempted  
 The journeying peasants ;  
 They go to inspect it.  
 A farce is being acted, 430  
 A goal for the drummer ;  
 Real music is playing—  
 No common accordion.  
 The play is not too deep,  
 But not stupid, either.  
 A bullet shot deftly  
 Fought into the eye  
 Of the hated policeman.  
 The tent is quite crowded,  
 The audience cracking 440  
 Their nuts, and exchanging  
 Remarks with each other.  
 And look—there's the vodka !  
 They're drinking and looking,  
 And looking and drinking,  
 Enjoying it highly,  
 With jubilant faces,  
 From time to time throwing

A right witty word  
Into Peterkin's speeches, 450  
Which *you'd* never hit on,  
Although you should swallow  
Your pen and your pad ! . . .

Some folk there are always  
Who crowd on the platform  
(The comedy ended),  
To greet the performers,  
To gossip and chat.

" How now, my fine fellows,  
And where do you come from ? " 460

" As serfs we used only  
To play for the masters,<sup>1</sup>  
But now we are free,  
And the man who will treat us  
Alone is our Master ! "  
" Well spoken, my brothers ;  
Enough time you've wasted  
Amusing the nobles ;  
Now play for the peasants !  
Here, waiter, bring vodka, 470  
Sweet wine, tea, and syrup,  
And see you make haste ! "

The sweet sparkling river  
Comes rolling to meet them ;  
They'll treat the musicians  
More handsomely, far,  
Than their masters of 'old.

<sup>1</sup> Each landowner kept his own band of musicians.

It is not the rushing  
     Of furious whirlwinds,  
 Not Mother Earth shaking— 480  
     'Tis shouting and singing  
 And swearing and fighting  
 And falling and kissing—  
     The people's carouse !  
 It seems to the peasants  
     That all in the village  
 Was reeling around them !  
     That even the church  
 With the very tall steeple  
     Had swayed once or twice ! 490

When things are in this state,  
     A man who is sober  
 Feels nearly as awkward  
     As one who is naked. . . .

The peasants recrossing  
     The market-p'ace, quitted  
 The turbulent village  
     At evening's approach.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DRUNKEN NIGHT

This village did not end,  
 As many in Russia,  
     In wind-mill or tavern,

In corn-loft or barn,  
But in a large building  
Of wood, with iron gratings  
In small narrow windows.  
The broad, sandy high-road,  
With borders of birch-trees,  
Spread out straight behind it— 10  
The grim étape—prison.<sup>1</sup>  
On week-days deserted  
It is, dull and silent,  
But now it is not so.  
All over the high-road,  
In neighbouring pathways,  
Wherever the eye falls,  
Are lying and crawling,  
Are driving and climbing,  
The numberless drunkards ; 20  
Their shout fills the skies.

The cart-wheels are screeching,  
And like slaughtered calves' heads  
Are nodding and wagging  
The pates limp and helpless  
Of peasants asleep.

They're dropping on all sides,  
As if from some ambush  
An enemy firing  
Is shooting them wholesale. 30  
The quiet night is falling,  
The moon is in Heaven,  
And God is commencing  
To write His great letter

<sup>1</sup> The [halting-place] for prisoners on their way to Siberia.





“ God save us, Parasha,  
Don't go to St. Petersburg !  
I know the genery :  
By day you're a maid,  
And by night you're a mistress.  
You spit at it, love. . . .” 70

“ Now, where are you running ? ”  
The pope bellows loudly  
To Lusy Pavloósha,  
The village policeman.

“ An accident's happened  
Down here, and a man's killed.”

“ God pardon our sins ! ”

“ How thin you've got, Dashka ! ”

“ The spinning-wheel fattens  
By turning forever ; 80  
I work just as hard,  
But I never get fatter.”

“ Heh, you, silly fellow,  
Come hither and love me !  
The dirty, dishevelled,  
And tipsy old woman,  
The f—i—lthy o—l—d woman ! ”

Our peasants, observing,  
Are still walking onwards.  
They see just before them 90  
A meek little fellow  
Most busily digging  
A hole in the road.

“ Now, what are you doing ? ”  
 “ A grave I am digging  
 To bury my mother ! ”

“ You fool !—Where’s your mother ?  
 Your new coat you’ve buried !  
 Roll into the ditch,  
 Dip your snout in the water. 100  
 ’Twill cool you, perhaps.”

“ Let’s see who’ll pull hardest ! ”  
 Two peasants are squatting  
 And, feet to feet pressing,  
 Are straining and groaning,  
 And tugging away  
 At a stick held between them.  
 This soon fails to please them .  
 “ Let’s try with our beards ! ”  
 And each man then clutches 110  
 The jaw of the other,  
 And tugs at his beard !  
 Red, panting, and writhing,  
 And gasping and yelping,  
 But pulling and pulling !  
 “ Enough there, you madmen ! ”  
 Cold water won’t part them ! ”

And in the ditch near them  
 Two women are squabbling ;  
 One cries, “ To go home now 120  
 Were worse than to prison ! ”  
 The other, “ You braggart !  
 In my house, I tell you,  
 It’s worse than in yours.  
 One son-in-law, punched me

And left a rib broken ;  
The second made off  
With my big ball of cotton ;  
The cotton don't matter,  
But in it was hidden  
My rouble in silver.

130

The youngest—he always  
Is up with his knife out.  
He'll kill me for sure ! ”

“ Enough, enough, darling !  
Now don't you be angry ! ”

Is heard not far distant  
From over a hillock—

“ Come on, I'm all right ! ”

A mischievous night, this ;  
On right hand, on left hand,  
Wherever the eye falls,  
Are sauntering couples.

140

The wood seems to please them ,  
They all stroll towards it,  
The wood—which is thrilling  
With nightingales' voices.

And later, the high-road  
Gets more and more ugly,

And more and more often  
The people are falling,

150

Are staggering, crawling,  
Or lying like corpses.

As always it happens  
On feast days in Russia—

No word can be uttered  
Without a great oath.

And near to the tavern  
Is quite a commotion ,

Some wheels get entangled 160  
And terrified horses  
Rush off without drivers.  
Here children are crying,  
And sad wives and mothers  
Are anxiously waiting ;  
And is the task easy  
Of getting the peasant  
Away from his drink ?

Just near to the sign-post  
A voice that's familiar 170  
Is heard by the peasants ;  
They see there the Barin  
(The same that helped Vavil,  
And bought him the boots  
To take home to his grandchild).  
He chats with the men.  
The peasants all open  
Their hearts to the Barin ;  
If some song should please him  
They'll sing it through five times ; 180  
"Just write the song down, sir !"  
If some saying strike him ;  
"Take note of the words !"  
And when he has written  
Enough, he says quietly,  
'The peasants are clever,  
But one thing is bad :  
They drink till they're helpless  
And lie about tipsy,  
It's painful to see." 190

They listen in silence.  
The Barin commences

To write something down  
In the little black note-book  
When, all of a sudden,  
A small, tipsy peasant,  
Who up to that moment  
Has lain on his stomach  
And gazed at the speaker,  
Springs up straight before him 200  
And snatches his pencil  
Right out of his hand :  
“ Wait, wait ! ” cries the fellow,  
“ Stop writing your stories,  
Dishonest and heartless,  
About the poor peasant.  
Say, what’s your complaint ?  
That sometimes the heart  
Of the peasant rejoices ?  
At times we drink hard, 210  
But we work ten times harder ;  
Among us are drunkards,  
But many more sober.  
Go, take through a village  
A pailful of vodka ;  
Go into the huts—  
In one, in another,  
They’ll swallow it gladly.  
But go to a third  
And you will find they won’t touch it !  
One family drinks, 221  
While another drinks nothing,  
Drinks nothing—and suffers  
As much as the drunkards :  
They, wisely or foolishly,  
Follow their conscience ,  
And see how misfortune,

The peasants' misfortune,  
 Will swallow that household  
 Hard-working and sober ! 230

Pray, have you seen ever  
 The time of the harvest

In some Russian village ?  
 Well, where were the people ?

At work in the tavein ?  
 Our fields may be broad,  
 But they don't give too freely.

Who robs them in spring-time,  
 And strips them in autumn ?

You've met with a peasant 240  
 At nightfall, perchance,

When the work has been finished ?  
 He's piled up great mountains

Of corn in the meadows,  
 He'll sap off a pea !

Hey, you mighty monster !  
 You builder of mountains,

I'll knock you flat down  
 With the stroke of a feather !

" Sweet food is the peasant's ! 250  
 But stomachs aren't mirrors,

And so we don't whimper  
 To see what we've eaten.

" We work single-handed,  
 But when we have finished  
 Three partners<sup>1</sup> are waiting  
 To share in the profits ;

A fourth<sup>2</sup> one there is, too,  
 Who eats like a Tartar—

<sup>1</sup> The tax collector, the landlord, and the priest.

<sup>2</sup> Fire.

Leaves nothing behind. 260

The other day, only,

A mean little fellow

Like you, came from Moscow

And clung to our backs.

‘ Oh, please sing him folk-songs ’

And ‘ tell him some proverbs, ’

‘ Some riddles and rhymes. ’

And then came another

To put us his questions :

How much do we work for ? 270

How much and how little

We stuff in our bellies ?

To count all the people

That live in the village

Upon his five fingers.

He did not *ask how much*

*The fire feeds the wind with*

*Of peasants’ hard work.*

Our drunkenness, maybe,

Can never be measured, 280

But look at our labour—

Can that then be measured ?

Our cares or our woes ?

“ The vodka prostrates us ;

But does not our labour,

Our trouble, prostrate us ?

The peasant won’t grumble

At each of his burdens,

He’ll set out to meet it,

And struggle to bear it ; 290

The peasant does not flinch

At life-wasting labour,

And tremble for fear

That his health may be injured.

Then why should he number  
Each cupful of vodka

For fear that an odd one  
May topple him over ?

You say that it's painful  
To see him lie tipsy ?—

300

Then go to the bog ;  
You'll see how the peasant  
Is squeezing the corn out,  
Is wading and crawling

Where no horse or rider,  
No man, though unloaded,  
Would venture to tread.

You'll see how the army  
Of profligate peasants

Is toiling in danger,

310

Is springing from one clod  
Of earth to another,  
Is pushing through bog-slime  
With backs nearly breaking !

The sun's beating down

On the peasants' bare heads,  
They are sweating and covered

With mud to the eyebrows,  
Their limbs torn and bleeding

By sharp, prickly bog-grass !

320

“ Does this picture please you ?

You say that you suffer ;

At least suffer wisely.

Don't use for a peasant

A gentleman's judgement ;

We are not white-handed

And tender-skinned creatures,



But men rough and lusty  
In work and in play.

“ The heart of each peasant 330  
Is black as a storm-cloud,  
Its thunder should peal  
And its blood rain in torrents ;  
But all ends in drink—  
For after one cupful  
The soul of the peasant  
Is kindly and smiling ;  
But don't let that hurt you !  
Look round and be joyful !  
Hey, fellows ! Hey, maidens ! 340  
You know how to foot it !  
Their bones may be aching,  
Their limbs have grown weary,  
But youth's joy and daring  
Is not quite extinguished,  
It lives in them yet ! ”

The peasant is standing  
On top of a hillock,  
And stamping his feet,  
And after being silent 350  
A moment, and gazing  
With glee at the masses  
Of holiday people,  
He roars to them hoarsely.

“ Hey you, peasant kingdom !  
You, hatless and drunken !  
More racket ! More noise ! ”  
“ Come, what's your name, uncle ? ”  
“ To write in the note-book ? ”

Why not ? Write it down : 360  
   ' In Barefoot the village  
 Lives old Jacob Naked,  
   He'll work till he's taken,  
 He drinks till he's crazed.'"  
   The peasants are laughing,  
 And telling the Barin  
   The old fellow's story :  
 How shabby old Jacob  
   Had lived once in Peter,<sup>1</sup>  
 And got into prison 370  
   Because he bethought him  
 To get him to law  
   With a very rich merchant ;  
 How after the prison  
   He'd come back amongst them  
 All stripped, like a linden,  
   And taker to ploughing.  
 For thirty years since  
   On his narrow allotment  
 He'd worked in all weathers, 380  
   The harrow his shelter  
 From sunshine and storm.  
   He lived with the sokha,<sup>2</sup>  
 And when God would take him  
   He'd drop from beneath it  
 Just like a black clod.  
   An accident happened  
 One year to old Jacob :  
   He bought some small pictures  
 To hang in the cottage 390  
   For his little son ;

<sup>1</sup> Popular name for Petrograd.

<sup>2</sup> The primitive wooden plough still used by the peasants in Russia.

The old man himself, too,  
Was fond of the pictures.  
God's curse had then fallen ;  
The village was burnt,  
And the old fellow's money,  
The fruit of a life-time  
(Some thirty-five roubles),<sup>1</sup>  
Was lost in the flames.  
He ought to have saved it, 400  
But, to his misfortune,  
He thought of the pictures  
And seized them instead.  
His wife in the meantime  
Was saving the icons.<sup>2</sup>  
And so, when the cottage  
Fell in, all the roubles  
Were melted together  
In one lump of silver.  
Old Jacob was offered 410  
Eleven such roubles  
For that silver lump.

“ O old brother Jacob,  
You paid for them dearly,  
The little chap's pictures !  
I warrant you've hung 'hem  
Again in the new hut.”

“ I've hung them—and more,”  
He replied, and was silent.

The Barin was looking, 420  
Examining Jacob,

<sup>1</sup> Three pounds.

<sup>2</sup> Holy pictures of the saints.

Th' toiler, the earth-worm,  
His chest thin and meagre,  
His stomach as shrunk  
As though something had crushed it,  
His eyes and mouth circled  
By numberless wrinkles,  
Like drought-shrivelled earth.  
And he altogether  
Resembled the earth, 430  
Thought the Barin, while noting  
His throat, like a dry lump  
Of clay, brown and hardened ;  
His brick-coloured face ;  
His hands—black and horny,  
Like bark on the tree-trunk ;  
His hair—stiff and sandy. . .

Th' peasants, remarking  
That old Jacob's speech  
Had not angered the Barin, 440  
Themselves took his words up :  
“ Yes, ycs, he speaks truly,  
We must drink, it saves us,  
It makes us feel strong.  
Why, if we did not drink  
Black gloom would engulf us.  
If work does not kill us  
Or trouble destroy us,  
We shan't die from drink ! ”

“ That's so. Is it not, sir ? ” 450  
“ Yes, God will protect us ! ”  
“ Come, drink with us, Barin ! ”

They go to buy vodka

And drink it together.

To Jacob the Barin  
Has offered two cups.

“ Ah, Barin,” says Jacob,  
“ I see you’re not angry.

A wise little head, yours,  
And how could a wise head 460

Judge falsely of peasants ?  
Why, only the pig

Glues his nose to the garbage  
And never sees Heaven ! ’

Then suddenly singing

Is heard in a chorus

Harmonious and bold.

A row of young fellows,

Half drunk, but not falling,  
Come staggering onwards, 470

All lustily singing ;

They sing of the Volga,

The daring of youths

And the beauty of maidens . . .

A hush falls all over

The road, and it listens ;

And only the singing

Is heard, broadly rolling

In waves, sweet and tuneful,  
Like wind-ruffled corn. 480

The hearts of the peasants

Are touched with wild anguish,

And one little woman

Grows pensive and mournful,

And then begins weeping

And sobs forth her grief :

“ My life is like day-time

With no sun to warm it !  
 My life is like night  
 With no glimmer of moon ! 490  
 And I—the young woman—  
 Am like the swift steed  
 On the curb, like the swallow  
 With wings crushed and broken ;  
 My jealous old husband  
 'Is drunken and snoring,  
 But even while snoring  
 He keeps one eye open,  
 And watches me always,  
 Me—poor little wife ! ” 500

And so she lamented,  
 The sad little woman ;  
 Then all of a sudden  
 Springs down from the waggon !  
 “ Where now ? ” cries her husband,  
 The jealous old man.  
 And just as one lifts  
 By the tail a plump radish,  
 He clutches her pig-tail,  
 And pulls her towards him. 510

O night wild and drunken,  
 Not bright—and yet star-lit,  
 Not hot—but fanned softly  
 By tender spring breezes.  
 You've not left our peasants  
 Untouched by your sweetness ;  
 They're thinking and longing  
 For their little women.  
 And they are quite right too ;  
 Still sweeter 'twould be 520  
 With a nice little wife !

## THE DRUNKEN NIGHT

63

Cries Ívan, " I love you,"  
And Mariushka, " I you ! "  
Cries Ívan, " Press closer ! "  
And Mariushka, " Kiss me ! "  
Cries Ívan, " The night's cold,"  
And Mariushka, " Warm me ! "

They think of this song now,  
And all make their minds up  
To shorten the journey. 530

A birch-tree is growing  
Alone by the roadside,  
God knows why so lonely !  
And under it spreading  
The magic white napkin,  
The peasants sit round it :

" Hey ! Napkin enchanted !  
Give food to the peasants ! "  
Two hands have come floating  
From no one sees where, 540  
Place a bucket of vodka,  
A large pile of bread,  
On the magic white napkin,  
And dwindle away.

The peasants feel strengthened,  
And leaving Román there  
On guard near the vodka,  
They mix with the people,  
To try to discover  
The one who is happy. 550

They're all in a hurry  
To turn towards home

## CHAPTER IV

1

## THE HAPPY ONES

In crowds gay and noisy  
 Our peasants are mixing,  
 Proclaiming their mission :  
 “ Let any man here  
 Who esteems himself happy  
 Stand forth ! If he prove it  
 A pailful of vodka  
 Is at his disposal ;  
 As much as he wishes  
 So much he shall have ! ”

10

This fabulous promise  
 Sets sober folk smiling ;  
 The tipsy and wise ones  
 Are ready to spit  
 In the beards of the pushing  
 Impertinent strangers !  
 But many are willing  
 To drink without payment,  
 And so when our peasants  
 Go back to the birch-tree

20

A crowd presses round them.  
 The first to come forward,  
 A lean discharged deacon,  
 With legs like two matches,  
 Lets forth a great mouthful  
 Of indistinct maxims :  
 That happiness lies not  
 In broad lands, in jewels,  
 In gold, and in sables—



## THE HAPPY ONES

65

“ In what, then ? ”

30

A peaceful  
And undisturbed conscience.  
That a'l the dominions  
Of land-owners, nobles,  
And Tsars are but earthly  
And limited treasures ;  
But he who is godly  
Has part in Christ's kingdom  
Of boundless extent :

“ When warm in the sun,  
With a cupful of vodka,  
I'm perfectly happy,  
I ask nothing more ! ”

40

“ And who'll give you vodka ? ”  
“ Why, you ! You have promised.”

“ Be off, you lean scamp ! ”

A one-eyed old woman  
Comes next, bent and pock-marked,  
And bowing before them

She says she is happy ;

50

That in her allotment  
A thousand fine turnips  
Have grown, this last autumn.

“ Such turnips, I tell you !  
Such monsters ! and tasty !

In such a small plot, too,  
In length only one yard,  
And three yards in width ! ”

They laugh at the woman,  
But give her no vodka ;

60

“Go, get you some, Mother !  
You’ve vodka enough there  
To flavour the turnips !”

A soldier with medals,  
Quite drunk but still thirsty,  
Says firmly, “I’m happy !”

“Then tell us, old fellow,  
In what he is happy—  
The soldier ? Take care, though,  
To keep nothing back !”

70

“Well, firstly, I’ve been  
Through at least twenty battles,  
And yet I’m alive.  
And, secondly, mark you  
(It’s far more important),  
In times of peace, too,  
Though I’m always half-famished,  
Death never has conquered !  
And, third, though they flogged me  
For every offence,  
Great or small, I’ve survived it !”

80

“Here, drink, little so’dier !  
With you one can’t argue ;  
You’re happy indeed !”

Then comes a young mason,  
A huge, weighty hammer  
Swung over his shoulder :  
“I live in content,”  
He declares, “with my wife  
And belov’d old mother ;  
We’ve nought to complain of.”

90

" In what are you happy ? "  
 " In this ! "—like a feather  
 He swings the great hammer.  
 " Beginning at sunrise "  
 And setting my back straight  
 As midnight draws near,  
 I can shatter a mountain !  
 Before now, it's happened  
 That, working one day, 100  
 I've piled enough stones up,  
 To earn my five roubles ! "

Pakhóm tries to lift it—  
 The " happiness." After  
 Prodigious straining  
 And cracking all over,  
 He sets it down, gladly,  
 And pours out some vodka.

" Well, weighty it is, man !  
 But will you be able 110  
 To bear in old age  
 Such a ' happiness,' think you ? "

" Don't boast of your strength ! "  
 Gasp'd a wheezing old peasant,  
 Half stifled with asthma.  
 (His nose pinched and shrivelled  
 Like that of a dead man,  
 His eyes bright and sunken,  
 His hands like a rake—  
 Stiffened, scraggy, and bony, 120  
 His legs long and narrow  
 Like spokes of a wheel,  
 A human mosquito.)

“ I was not a worse man  
 Than he, the young mason,  
 And boasted of *my* strength.  
 God punished me for it !  
 The manager knew  
 I was simple—the villain !  
 He flattered and praised me 130  
 I was but a youngster,  
 And pleased at his notice  
 I laboured like four men.  
 One day I had mounted  
 Some bricks to my shoulder,  
 When, just then, the devil  
 Must bring him in sight.

“ ‘ What’s that ! ’ he said laughing,  
 ‘ ’Tis surely not Triton  
 With such a light burden ! 140  
 Ho, does it not shame  
 Such a strapping young fellow ? ’  
 ‘ Then put some more bricks on,  
 I’ll carry them, master,’  
 Said I, sore offended.  
 For full half an hour  
 I stood while he piled them,  
 He piled them—the dog !  
 I felt my back breaking,  
 But would not give way, 150  
 And that devilish burden  
 I carried right up  
 To the high second story !  
 He stood and looked on,  
 He himself was astounded,  
 And cried from beneath me :  
 ‘ Well done, my brave fellow !

You don't know yourself, man,  
What you have been doing !

It's forty stone, Trifon, 160  
You've carried up there !'

" I *did* know ; my heart  
Struck my breast like a hammer,  
The blood stood in circles  
Round both of my eyeballs ;  
My back felt disjointed,  
My legs weak and trembling . . .

'Twas then that I withered.  
Come, treat me, my friends ! "

" But why should we treat you ?

In what are you happy ? 171

In what you have told us ? "

" No, listen—that's coming,  
It's this : I have also,

Like each of us peasants,  
Besought God to let me

Return to the village  
To die. And when coming

From Petersburg, after 180  
The illness I suffered

Through what I have told you,  
Exhausted and weakened,

Half-dazed, half-unconscious,  
I got to the station.

And all in the carriage  
Were workmen, as I was,

And ill of the fever ;  
And all yearned for one thing :  
To reach their own homes

Before death overcame them. 190  
    'Twas then I was lucky ;  
The heat then was stifling,  
    And so many sick heads  
Made Hell of the waggon.  
    Here one man was groaning,  
There, rolling all over  
    The floor, like a lunatic,  
Shouting and raving  
    Of wife or of mother.  
And many such fellows 200  
    Were put out and left  
At the stations we came to.  
    I looked at them, thinking,  
Shall I be left too ?  
    I was burning and shaking,  
The blood began starting  
    All over my eyeballs,  
And I, in my fever,  
    Half-waking, was dreaming  
Of cutting of cocks' throats 210  
    (We once were cock-farmers,  
And one year it happened  
    We fattened a thousand).  
They came to my thoughts, now,  
    The damnable creatures,  
I tried to start praying,  
    But no !—it was useless.  
And, would you believe me ?  
    I saw the whole party  
In that hellish waggon 220  
    Come quivering round me,  
Their throats cut, and sparting  
With blood, and still crowing,  
    And I, with the knife, shrieked :

‘ Enough of yo ur noise ! ’  
And yet, by God’s mercy,  
Made no sound at all.

I sat there and struggled  
To keep myself silent.

At last the day ended, 230  
And with it the journey,

And God had had pity  
Upon His poor orphan ;

I crawled to the village.  
And now, by His mercy, .  
I’m better again.”

“ Is that what you boast of—  
Your happiness, peasant ? ”

Exclaims an old lackey  
With legs weak and gouty. 240

“ Treat me, little brothers,  
I’m happy, God sees it !

For I was the chief serf  
Of Prince Pereméteff,

A rich prince, and mighty,  
My wife, the most favoured

By him, of the women ;  
My daughter, together

With his, the young lady,  
Was taught foreign languages, 250

French and some others ;  
And she was permitted

To *sit*, and not stand,  
In her mistress’s presence.

Good Lord ! How it bites ! ”  
(He scoops down to rub it,

The gouty right l nee-cap.)  
The peasants laugh loudly !

“What laugh you at, stupids ?”  
 He cries, getting angry, 260  
 ‘I’m ill, I thank God,  
 And at waking and sleeping  
 I pray, ‘Leave me ever  
 My honoured complaint, Lord !  
 For that makes me noble !’  
 I’ve none of your low things,  
 Your peasants’ diseases  
 My illness is lofty,  
 And only acquired  
 By the most elevated, 270  
 The first in the Empire ;  
 I suffer, you villains,  
 From gout, gout its name is !  
 It’s only brought on  
 By the drinking of claret,  
 Of Burgundy, champagne,  
 Hungarian syrup,  
 By thirty years’ drinking !  
 For forty years, peasants,  
 I’ve stood up behind it— 280  
 The chair of His Highness,  
 The Prince Pereméteff,  
 And swallowed the leavings  
 In plates and in glasses,  
 The finest French truffles,  
 The dregs of the liquors.  
 Come, treat me, you peasants !”

“Excuse us, your Lordship,  
 Our wine is but simple,  
 The drink of the peasants ! 290  
 It wouldn’t suit *you* !”



A bent, yellow-haired man  
 Steals up to the peasants,  
 A man from White Russia  
 He yearns for the vodka.  
 "Oh, give me a taste!"  
 He implores, "I am happy!"

"But wait! You must tell us,  
 In what you are happy."

"In bread I am happy ; 300  
 At home, in White Russia,  
 The bread is of barley,  
 All gritty and weedy.  
 At times, I can tell you,  
 I've howled out aloud,  
 Like a woman in labour,  
 With pains in my stomach!  
 But now, by God's mercy,  
 I work for Gubónine,  
 And there they give rye-bread, 310  
 I'm happy in that."

A dark-looking peasant,  
 With jaw turned and twisted,  
 Which makes him look sideways,  
 Says next, "I am happy.  
 A bear-hunter I am,  
 And six of my comrades  
 Were killed by old Mishka ;<sup>1</sup>  
 On me God has mercy."

"Look round to the left side." 320

<sup>1</sup> The Russian nickname for the bear

He tries to, b it cannot,  
For all his grimaces !

“ A bear knocked my jaw round,  
A savage young female.”

“ Go, look for another,  
And give her the left cheek,  
She'll soon put it straight ! ”

They laugh, but, however,  
They give him some vodka.  
Some ragged old beggars  
Come up to the peasants,  
Drawn near by the smell  
Of the froth on the vodka ;  
They say they are happy.

330

“ Why, right on his threshold  
The shopman wi'll meet us !  
We go to a house-door,  
From there they conduct us  
Right back to the gate !  
When we begin singing  
The housewife runs quickly  
And brings to the window  
A loaf and a knife.  
And then we sing loudly,  
' Oh, give us the whole loaf,  
It cannot be cut  
And it cannot be crumbled,  
For you it is quicker,  
For us it is better ! ' ”

340

The peasants observe 350

That their vodka is wasted,  
The pail's nearly empty.

They say to the people,  
" Enough of your chatter,  
You, shabby and ragged.  
You, humpbacked and corny,  
Go, get you all home ! "

" In your place, good strangers,"  
The peasant, Fedócy,  
From " Swallow-Smoke " village, 360

Said, sitting beside them,  
" I'd ask Érmil Gírin.  
If he will not suit you,  
If he is not happy,  
Then no one can help you."

" But who is this Érmil,  
A noble—a prince ? "

" No prince—not a noble,  
But simply a peasant."

" Well, tell us about him." 370

" I'll tell you ; he rented  
The mill of an orphan,  
Until the Court settled  
To sell it at auction.

Then Érmil, with others,  
Went into the sale-room.

The small buyers quickly  
Dropped out of the bidding ;  
Till Érmil alone,

With a merchant, Alté nikoff, 380  
Kept up the fight.



Then Érmil departed,  
The sellers exchanging  
Sly looks with the merchant,  
And grinning—the foxes !  
But Érmil went out  
And made haste to the market-place  
Crowded with people 420  
(’Twas market-day, then),  
And he mounted a waggon,  
And there he stood crossing  
Himself, and low bowing  
In all four directions.  
He cried to the people,  
‘ Be silent a moment,  
I’ve something to ask you ! ’  
The place became still  
And he told them the story . 430

“ ‘ Since long has the merchant  
Been wooing the mill,  
But I’m not such a dullard.  
Five times have I been here  
To ask if there *would* be  
A second day’s bidding,  
They answered, “ There will.”  
You know that the peasant  
Won’t carry his money  
All over the by-ways 440  
Without a good reason,  
So I have none with me .  
And look—now they tell me  
There’s no second bidding  
And ask for the money !  
The cunning ones tricked me  
And laughed—the base heathens !

And said to me sneering :

“ But, what can you do  
In an hour ? Where find money ? ” 450

“ ‘ They’re crafty and strong,  
But the people are stronger !

The merchant is rich—  
But the people are richer !  
Hey ! What is *his* worth  
To *thei*r treasury, think you ?

Like fish in the ocean  
Th<sup>e</sup> wealth of the people ;  
You’ll draw it and draw it—  
But not see its end !

460

Now, brother, God hears me,  
Come, give me this money !

Next Friday I’ll pay you  
The ery last farthing.

It’s not that I care  
For the mill—it’s the insult !

Whoever knows Érmil,  
Whoever believes him,  
Will give what he can.’

“ A miracle happened , 470  
The coat of each peasant  
Flew up on the left

As though blown by a wind !

The peasants are bringing  
Their money to Érmil,

Each gives what he can.  
Though Érmil’s well lettered

He writes nothing down ;  
It’s well he can count it

So great is his hurry. 480

They gather his hat full  
Of all kinds of money,  
From farthings to bank-notes,  
The notes of the peasant  
All crumpled and torn.

He has the whole sum now,  
But still the good people  
Are bringing him more.

“ ‘ Here, take this, too, Érmil,  
You’ll pay it back later ! ’ ” 490

“ He bows to the people  
In all four directions,  
Gets down from the waggon,  
And pressing the hat  
Full of money against him,  
Runs back to the sale-room  
As fast as he can.

“ The sellers are speechless  
And stare in amazement,  
The merchant turns green 500  
As the money is counted  
And laid oh the table.

“ The sellers come round him  
All craftily praising  
His excellent bargain.  
But Érmil sees through them ;  
He gives not a farthing,  
He speaks not a word.

“ The whole town assembles  
At market next Friday, 510  
When Érmil is paying

HIS debt to the people.

How can he remember  
To whom he must pay it ?

No murmur arises,  
No sound of discussion,  
As each man tells quietly  
The sum to be paid him.

“ And Érmil himself said,  
That when it was finished 520  
A rouble was lying  
With no one to claim it ;  
And though till the evening  
He went, with purse open,  
Demanding the owner,  
It still was unclaimed.  
The sun was just setting  
When Érmil, the last one  
To go from the market,  
Assembled the beggars 530  
And gave them the rouble.” . . .

“ ’Tis strange ! ” say the peasants,  
“ By what kind of magic  
Can one single peasant  
Gain such a dominion  
All over the country ? ”

‘ No magic he uses  
Save truthfulness, brothers !  
But say, have you ever  
Heard tell of Prince Yurlof’s 540  
Estate, Adovshina ? ”

“ We have. What about it ? ”  
“ The manager there



Was a Colonel, with stars,  
Of the Corps of Gendarmes.

He had six or seven  
Assistants beneath him,  
And Érmil was chosen  
As principal clerk.

He was but a boy, then, 550  
Of nineteen or twenty ;

And though 'tis no fine post,  
The clerk's—to the peasants  
The clerk is a great man ;

To him they will go  
For advice and with questions.

Though Érmil had power to,  
He asked nothing from them ;

And if they should offer  
He never accepted. 560

(He bears a poor conscience,  
The peasant who covets

The mite of his brother !)  
Well, five years went by,

And they trusted in Érmil,  
When all of a sudden

The master dismissed him  
For sake of another.

And sadly they felt it.  
The new clerk was grasping ; 570

He moved not a finger  
Unless it was paid for ;

A letter—three farthings !  
A question—five farthings !

Well, he was a pope's son  
And God placed him rightly !

But still, by God's mercy,  
He did not stay long :

“The old Prince soon died,  
And the young Prince was master. 580

He came and dismissed them—  
The manager-colonel,

The clerk and assistants,  
And summoned the peasants

To choose them an Elder.  
They weren't long about it !

And eight thousand voices  
Cried out, ‘ Érmil Girin ! ’

As though they were one.  
Then Érmil was sent for 590

To speak with the Barin.

And after some minutes

The Barin came out  
On the balcony, standing

In face of the people ;  
He cried, ‘ Well, my brothers,

Your choice is elected  
With my princely sanction !

But answer me this :  
Don't you think he's too youthful ? ’ 600

“ ‘ No, no, little Father !  
He's young, but he's wise ! ’

“ So Érmil was Elder,  
For seven years ruled

In the Prince's dominion.  
Not once in that time

Did a coin of the peasants  
Come under his nail,

Did the innocent suffer,  
The guilty escape him, 610

He followed his conscience.”

" But stop ! " exclaimed hoarsely  
 A shrivelled grey pope,  
 Interrupting the speaker,  
 " The harrow went smoothly  
 Enough, till it happened  
 To strike on a stone,  
 Then it swerved of a sudden.  
 In telling a story  
 Don't leave an odd word out      620  
 And alter the rhythm !  
 Now, if you knew Ėrmil  
 You knew his young brother,  
 Knew Mityenka, did you ? "

The speaker considered,  
 Then said, " I'd forgotten,  
 I'll tell you about it :  
 It happened that once  
 Even Ėrmil the peasant  
 Did wrong : his young brother,      630  
 Unjustly exempted  
 From serving his time,  
 On the day of recruiting ;  
 And we were all silent,  
 And how could we argue  
 When even the Barin  
 Himself would not order  
 The Elder's own brother  
 To unwilling service ?  
 And only one woman,      640  
 Old Vlásevna, shedding  
 Wild tears for her son,  
 Went bewailing and screaming :  
 ' It wasn't our turn ! '  
 Well, of course she'd be certain

To scream for a time,  
Then leave off and be silent.  
But what happened then ?  
The recruiting was finished,  
But Érmil had changed ; 650  
He was mournful and gloomy ;  
He ate not, he drank not,  
Till one day his father  
Went into the stable  
And found him there holding  
A rope in his hands.  
Then at last he unbosomed  
His heart to his father :  
‘ Since Vlasevna’s son  
Has been sent to the service, 660  
I’m weary of living,  
I wish but to die ! ’  
His brothers came also,  
And they with the father  
Besought him to hear them,  
To listen to reason.  
But he only answered :  
‘ A villain I am,  
And a criminal ; bind me,  
And bring me to justice ! ’ 670  
And they, fearing worse things,  
Obeyed him and bound him.  
The commune assembled,  
Exclaiming and shouting ;  
They’d never been summoned  
To witness or judge  
Such peculiar proceedings.

“ And Érmil’s relations  
Did not beg for mercy

And lenient treatment, 680  
But rather for firmness :  
‘ Bring Vláševna’s son back  
Or Érmil will hang himself,  
Nothing will save him ! ’  
And then appeared Érmil  
Himself, pale and bare-foot,  
With ropes bound and handcuffed,  
And bowing his head  
He spoke low to the people :  
‘ The time was when I was 690  
Your judge ; and I judged you,  
In all things obeying  
My conscience. But I now  
Am guiltier far  
Than were you. Be my judges ! ’  
He bowed to our feet,  
The demented one, sighing,  
Then stood up and crossed himself,  
Trembling all over ;  
It pained us to witness 700  
How he, of a sudden,  
Fell down on his knees there  
At Vláševna’s feet.  
Well, all was put right soon,  
The nobles have fingers  
In every small corner,  
The lad was brought back  
And young Mityenka started ;  
They say that his service  
Did not weigh too heavy, 710  
The prince saw to that.  
And we, as a penance,  
Imposed upon Érmil  
A fine, and to Vláševna

One part was given,  
 To Mitya another,  
 The rest to the village  
 For vodka. However,  
 Not quickly did Érmil  
 Get over his sorrow : 720  
 He went like a lost one  
 For full a year after,  
 And—though the whole district  
 Implored him to keep it—  
 He left his position.  
 He rented the mill, then,  
 And more than of old  
 Was beloved by the people.  
 He took for his grinding  
 No more than was honest 730  
 His customers never  
 Kept waiting a moment,  
 And all men alike :  
 The rich landlord, the workman,  
 The master and servant,  
 The poorest of peasants  
 Were served as their turn came ;  
 Strict order he kept.  
 Myself, I have not been  
 Since long in that district. 740  
 But often the people  
 Have told me about him.  
 And never could praise him  
 Enough. So in your place  
 I'd go and ask Érmil ”

“ Your time would be wasted,”  
 The grey-headed pope,  
 Who'd before interrupted,

Remarked to the peasants.

“ I knew Érmil Gírin, 750

I chanced in that district  
Some five years ago.

I have often been shifted,  
Our bishop loved vastly

To keep us all moving,  
So I was his neighbour.

Yes, he was a peasant  
Unique, I bear witness,

And all things he owned  
That can make a man happy . 760

Peace, riches, and honour,  
And that kind of honour

Most valued and precious,  
Which cannot be purchased

By might or by money,  
But only by righteousness,

Wisdom and kindness.

But still, I repeat it,

Your time will be wasted

In going to Érmil : 770

In prison he lies.”

“ How’s that ? ”

“ God so willed it  
You’ve heard how the peasants  
Of ‘ Log ’ the Pomyéshchick

Of Province ‘ Affrighted,’  
Of District ‘ Scarce-Breathing,’

Of village ‘ Dumbfounded,’  
Revolted ‘ for causes

Entirely unknown,’ 780

As they say in the papers.

(I once used to read them.)

And so, too, in this case,  
The local Ispravnik,<sup>1</sup>

The Tsar's high officials,  
And even the peasants,  
'Dumbfounded' themselves,

Never fathomed the reason

Of all the disturbance.

But things became bad, , 90

And the soldiers were sent for,

The Tsar packed a messenger

Off in a hurry

To speak to the people.

His epaulettes rose

To his ears as he coaxed them

And cursed them together.

But curses they're used to,

And coaxing was lost,

For they don't understand it : 800

' Brave orthodox peasants ! '

' The Tsar—Little Father ! '

' Our dear Mother Russia ! '

He bellowed and shouted

Until he was hoarse,

While the peasants stood round him

And listened in wonder.

" But when he was tired

Of these peaceable measures

Of calming the riots, 810

At length he decided

On giving the order

Of ' Fire ' to the soldiers ;

When all of a sudden

<sup>1</sup> Chief of police.



A bright thought occurred  
 To the clerk of the Volost.<sup>1</sup>  
 'The people trust Gírin,  
 The people will hear him !'  
 "Then let him be brought !"<sup>2</sup>  
 \* \* \* \*

A cry has arisen 820  
 "Have mercy ! Have mercy !"  
 A check to the story ;  
 They hurry off quickly  
 To see what has happened ;  
 And there on a bank  
 Of a ditch near the roadside,  
 Some peasants are birching  
 A drunken old lackey,  
 Just taken in thieving.  
 A court had been summoned, 830  
 The judges deciding  
 To birch the offender,  
 That each of the jury  
 (About three and twenty)  
 Should give him a stroke  
 Turn in turn of the rod. . . .

The lackey was up  
 And made off, in a twinkling,  
 He took to his heels  
 Without stopping to argue, 840  
 On two scraggy legs.

"How he trips it—the dandy !"  
 The peasants cry, laughing ;

<sup>1</sup> An administrative unit consisting of a group of villages

<sup>2</sup> The end of the story is omitted because of the interference of the Censor.

They've soon recognized him ;  
The boaster who prated  
So much of his illness  
From drinking strange liquors.

“ Ho ! where has it gone to,  
Your noble complaint ?  
Look how nimble he's getting ! ” 850

“ Well, well, Little Fatner,  
Now finish the story ! ”

“ It's time to go home now,  
My children,—God willing,  
We'll meet again some day  
And finish it then. . . . ”

The people disperse  
As the dawn is approaching.  
Our peasants begin  
To bethink them of sleeping, 860

When all of a sudden  
A “ troika ”<sup>1</sup> comes flying  
From no one sees where,  
With its silver bells ringing.

Within it is sitting  
A plump little Barin,  
His little mouth smoking  
A little cigar.

The peasants draw up  
In a line on the roadway, 870  
Thus barring the passage  
In front of the horses ;  
And, standing bareheaded,  
Bow low to the Barin.

<sup>1</sup> A three-horsed carriage.

## CHAPTER V

## THE POMYÉSHCHICK

The "troika" is drawing  
 The local Pomyéshchick—  
 Gavril Afanásich  
 Obólt-Oboldoóeff.  
 A portly Pomyéshchick,  
 With long grey moustaches,  
 Some sixty years old.  
 His bearing is stately,  
 His cheeks very rosy,  
 He wears a short top-coat  
 Tight-fitting and braided,  
 Hungarian fashion ;  
 And very wide trousers.  
 Gavril Afanásich  
 Was probably startled  
 At seeing the peasants  
 Unflinchingly barring  
 The way to his horses ;  
 He promptly produces  
 A loaded revolver  
 As bulky and round  
 As himself ; and directs it  
 Upon the intruders :

10

20

" You brigands ! You cut-throats !  
 Don't move, or I shoot ! "

" How can we be brigands ? "  
 The peasants say, laughing,  
 " No knives and no pitchforks,  
 No hatchets have we ! "

“ Who are you ? And what  
Do you want ? ” said the Barin. 30

“ A trouble torments us,  
It draws us away  
From our wives, from our children,  
Away from our work,  
Kills our appetites too.  
Do give us your promise  
To answer us truly,  
Consulting your conscience  
And searching your knowledge, 40  
Not sneering, nor feigning  
The question we put you.  
And then we will tell you  
The cause of our trouble.”

“ I promise. I give you  
The oath of a noble.”

“ No, don't give us that—  
Not the oath of a noble !  
We're better content  
With the word of a Christian. 50  
The nobleman's oaths—  
They are given with curses,  
With kicks and with blows !  
We are better without 'hem ! ”

“ Eh-heh, that's a new creed !  
Well, let it be so, then.  
And what is your trouble ? ”

“ But put up the pistol !  
That's right ! Now we'll tell you :

We are not assassins, 60  
 But peaceable peasants,  
 From Government 'Hard-pressed,'  
 From District 'Most Wretched,'  
 From 'Destitute' Parish,  
 From neighbouring hamlets,—  
 'Patched,' 'Bare-Foot,' and 'Shabby,'  
 'Bleak,' 'Burnt-out,' and 'Hungry,'  
 From 'Harvestless,' too.  
 We met in the roadway,  
 And one asked another, 70  
 Who is ne—the man  
 Free and happy in Russia ?  
 I uká said, 'The pope,'  
 And Roman, 'The Pomyéshchick,'  
 Demyán, 'The official.'  
 'The round-bellied merchant,'  
 Said both brothers Gcóbin,  
 Mitródor and Ívan ;  
 Pakhóm said, 'His Highness,  
 The Tsar's Chief Adviser,' 80  
 And Prov said 'The Tsar.'

"Like bulls are the peasants,  
 Once folly is in them  
 You cannot dislodge it,  
 Although you should beat them  
 With stout wooden cudgels,  
 They stick to their folly,  
 And nothing can move them !  
 We argued and argued,  
 While arguing quarrelled, 90  
 While quarrelling fought,  
 Till at last we decided  
 That never again

Would we turn our steps homeward  
 To kiss wives and children,  
 To see the old people,  
 Until we have settled  
 The subject of discord ;  
 Until we have found  
 The reply to our question—  
 Of who can, in Russia,  
 Be happy and free ? 100

“ Now tell us, Pomyéshchick,  
 Is your life a sweet one ?  
 And is the Pomyéshchick  
 Both happy and free ? ”

Gavríl Afanásich  
 Springs out of the “ troika ”  
 And comes to the peasants.  
 He takes—like a doctor—  
 The hand of each one,  
 And carefully feeling  
 The pulse gazes searchingly  
 Into their faces,  
 Then clasps his plump sides  
 And stands shaking with laughter.  
 The clear, hearty laugh  
 Of the healthy Pomyéshchick  
 Peals out in the pleasant  
 Cool air of the morning :  
 “ Ha-ha ! Ha-ha-ha ! ”  
 Till he stops from exhaustion.  
 And then he addresses  
 The wondering peasants :  
 “ Put on your hats, *gentlemen*.  
 Please to be seated ! ” 110 120

(He speaks with a bitter <sup>1</sup>  
And mocking politeness.)

“ But we are not gentry ;  
We’d rather stand up  
In your presence, your worship.” 130

“ Sit down, worthy *citizens*,  
Here on the bank.”

The peasants protest,  
But, on seeing it useless,  
Sit down on the bank.

“ May I sit beside you ?  
Hey, Proshka ! Some sherry.  
My rug and a cushion ! ”  
He sits on the rug. 140  
Having finished the sherry,  
Thus speaks the Pomyéshchick .

“ I gave you my promise  
To answer your question. . . .  
The task is not easy,  
For though you are highly  
Respectable people,  
You’re not very learned.  
Well, firstly, I’ll try  
To explain you the meaning 150  
Of Lord, or Pomyéshchick.  
Have you, by some chance,  
Ever heard the expression

<sup>1</sup> The Pomyéshchick is still bitter because his serfs have been set free by the Government.

The ' Family Tree ' ?

Do you know what it means ? ”

“ The woods are not closed to us.

We have seen all kinds

Of trees,” say the peasants.

“ Your shot has miscarried !

I'll try to speak clearly ; 160

I come of an ancient,

Illustrious family ;

One, Oboldoóeff,

My ancestor, is

Amongst those who were mentioned

In old Russian chronicles

Written for certain

Two hundred and fifty

Years back. It is written,

“ 'Twas given the Tartar, 170

Obólt-Oboldoóeff,

A piece of cloth, value

Two roubles, for having

Amused the Tsaritsa

Upon the Tsar's birthday

By fights of wild beasts,

Wolves and foxes. He also

Permitted his own bear

To fight with a wild one,

Which mauled Oboldoóeff, 180

And hurt him severely.’

And now, gentle peasants,

Did you understand ? ”

“ Why not ? To this day

One can see them—the loafers

Who stroll about leading

A bear ! ”



“ Be it so, then !  
But now, please be silent,  
And hark to what follows : 190  
From this OboldJoóeff  
My family sprang ;  
And this incident happened  
Two hundred and fifty  
Years back, as I told you,  
But still, on my mother’s side,  
Even more ancient  
The family is :  
Says ‘another old writing .  
‘ Prince Schépin, and one 200  
Vaska Goóseff, attempted  
To burn down the city  
Of Moscow They wanted  
To plunder the Treasury.  
They were beheaded.’  
And this was, good peasants,  
Full three hundred years back !  
From these roots it was  
That our Family Tree sprang.”

“ And you are the . . . as one 210  
Might say . . . little apple  
Which hangs on a branch .  
Of the tree,” say the peasants.

“ Well, apple, then, call it,  
So long as it please you.  
At least you appear  
To have got at my meaning.  
And now, you yourselves  
Understand—the more ancient  
A family is 220

The more noble its members.  
Is that so, good peasants ? ”

“ That’s so,” say the peasants.  
“ The black bone and white bone  
Are different, and they must  
Be differently honoured ”

“ Exactly. I see, friends,  
You quite understand me.”  
The Barin continued :  
“ In past times we lived, 230  
As they say, ‘ in the bosom  
Of Christ,’ and we knew  
What it meant to be honoured !  
Not only the people  
Obeyed and revered us,  
But even the earth  
And the waters of Russia.  
You knew what it was  
To be One, in the centre  
Of vast, spreading lands, 240  
Like the sun in the heavens  
The clustering villages  
Yours, yours the meadows,  
And yours the black depths  
Of the great virgin forests !  
You pass through a village ;  
The people will meet you,  
Will fall at your feet ;  
Or you stroll in the forest ;  
The mighty old trees 250  
Bend their branches before you.  
Through meadows you saunter ;  
The slim golden corn-stems

Rejoicing, will curtsey  
With winning caresses,  
Will hail you as Master.  
'The little fish sports  
In the cool little river ;  
Get fat, little fish,  
At the will of the Master ! 260  
The little hare speeds  
Through the green little meadow ;  
Speed, speed, little hare, ,  
Till the coming of autumn, ,  
The season of hunting,  
The sport of the Master.  
And all things exist  
But to gladden the Master.  
Each wee blade of grass  
Whispers lovingly to him, 270  
' I live but for thee. . . . '

"The joy and the beauty,  
The pride of all Russia—  
The Lord's holy churches—  
Which brighten the hill-sides  
And gleam like great jewels  
On the slopes of the valleys,  
Were rivalled by one thing  
In glory, and that  
Was the nobleman's manor. 280  
Adjoining the manor  
Were glass-houses sparkling,  
And bright Chinese arbours,  
While parks spread around it.  
On each of the buildings  
Gay banners displaying  
Their radiant colours,

And beckoning softly,  
 Invited the guest  
 To partake of the pleasures, 290  
 Of rich hospitality.  
 Never did Frenchmen  
 In dreams even picture  
 Such sumptuous revels  
 As we used to hold.  
 Not only for one day,  
 Or two, did they last—  
 But for whole months together !  
 We fattened great turkeys,  
 We brewed our own liquors, 300  
 We kept our own actors,  
 And troupes of musicians,  
 And legions of servants !  
 Why, I kept five cooks,  
 Besides pastry-cooks, working,  
 Two blacksmiths, three carpenters,  
 Eighteen musicians,  
 And twenty-two huntsmen.  
 My God ! . . .”

The afflicted 310  
 Pomyéshchick broke down here,  
 And hastened to bury  
 His face in the cushion. . . .  
 “Hey, Proshka !” he cried,  
 And then quickly the lackey  
 Poured out and presented  
 A glassful of brandy.  
 The glass was soon empty,  
 And when the Pomyéshchick  
 Had rested awhile, 320  
 He again began speaking :

“ Ah, then, Mother Russia  
How gladly in autumn  
Your forests awoke  
To the horn of the huntsman !  
Their dark, gloomy depths,  
Which had saddened and faded,  
Were pierced by the clear  
Ringing blast, and they listened,  
Revived and rejoiced, 330  
To the laugh of the echo.  
The hounds and the huntsmen  
Are gathered together,  
And wait on the skirts  
Of the forest ; and with them  
The Master ; and farther  
Within the deep forest  
The dog-keepers, roaring  
And shouting like madmen,  
The hounds all a-bubble 340  
Like fast-boiling water.  
Hark ! There's the horn calling !  
You hear the pack yelling ?  
They're crowding together !  
And where's the red beast ?  
Hoo-loo-loo ! Hoo-loo-loo !  
And the sly fox is ready ;  
Fat, furry old Reynard  
Is flying before us,  
His bushy tail waving ! 350  
The knowing hounds crouch,  
And each lithe body quivers,  
Suppressing the fire  
That is blazing within it :  
‘ Dear guests of our hearts,  
Do come nearer and greet us,

We're panting to meet you,  
 We, hale little fellows !  
 Come nearer to us  
 And a-vay from the bushes ! ' 360

"They're off ! Now, my horse,  
 Let your swiftness not fail me !  
 My hounds, you are staunch  
 And you will not betray me !  
 Hoo-loo ! Faster, faster !  
 Now, *at him*, my children ! . . ."  
 Gavril Afanásich  
 Springs up, wildly shouting,  
 His arms waving madly,  
 He dances around them ! 370  
 He's certainly after  
 A fox in the forest !

The peasants observe him  
 In silent enjoyment,  
 They smile in their beards. . . .

"Eh . . . you, mad, merry hunters !  
 Although he forgets  
 Many things—the Pomyéshchick—  
 Those hunts in the autumn  
 Will not be forgotten. 380  
 'Tis not for our own loss  
 We grieve, Mother Russia,  
 But you that we pity ;  
 For you, with the hunting  
 Have lost the last traces  
 Of days bold and warlike  
 That made you majestic. . . .

"At times, in the autumn,  
 A party of fifty

THE POMYÉSHCHICK ,103

Would start on a hunting tour ; 390  
Then each Pomyéshchick

Brought with 'him a hundred  
Fine dogs, and, twelve keepers,  
And cooks in abundance.

And after the cooks  
Came a long line of waggons  
Containing provisions.

And as we went forward  
With music and singing,  
You might have mistaken 400  
Our band for a fine troop

Of cavalry, moving !  
The time flew for us  
Like a falcon." How lightly  
The breast of the nobleman  
Rose, while his spirit  
Went back to the days  
Of Old Russia, and greeted  
The gallant Boyárin.<sup>1</sup> . . .

" No whim was denied us. 410  
To whom I desire

I show mercy and favour ,  
And whom I dislike  
I strike dead on the spot.

The law is my wish,  
And my fist is my hangman !  
My blow makes the sparks 'crowd,  
My blow smashes jaw-bones,  
My blow scatters teeth ! . . . ;

Like a string that is broken, 420  
The voice of the nobleman  
Suddenly ceases ;

<sup>1</sup> The Russian warriors of olden times.

He lowers his eyes  
 To the ground, darkly frowning . . .  
 And then, in a low voice,  
 He says :

“ You yourselves know  
 That strictness is needful ;  
 But I, with love, punished.  
 The chain has been broken, 430  
 The links burst asunder ;  
 And though we do not beat  
 The peasant, no longer  
 We look now upon him  
 With fatherly feelings.  
 Yes, I was severe too  
 At times, but more often  
 I turned hearts towards me  
 With patience and mildness.

“ Upon Easter Sunday 440  
 I kissed all the peasants  
 Within my domain.  
 A great table, loaded  
 With ‘ Paska ’ and ‘ Koólich ’<sup>1</sup>  
 And eggs of all colours,  
 Was spread in the manor.  
 My wife, my old mother,  
 My sons, too, and even  
 My daughters did not scorn  
 To kiss<sup>2</sup> the last peasant : 450  
 ‘ Now Christ has arisen ! ’  
 ‘ Indeed He has risen ! ’

<sup>1</sup> Russian Easter dishes

<sup>2</sup> Russians embrace one another on Easter Sunday,  
 recalling the resurrection of Christ.



The peasants broke <sup>1</sup>fast then,  
 Drank vodka and wine.  
 Before each great holiday,  
 In my best staterooms  
 The All-Night Thanksgiving  
 Was held by the pope.  
 My scrfs were invited  
 With every inducement : 460  
 ' Pray he<sup>r</sup>d now, my children,  
 Make use of the chance,  
 Though you crack all your foreheads <sup>1</sup> ' <sup>1</sup>  
 The nose suffered somewhat,  
 But still at the finish  
 We brought all the women-folk  
 Out of a village  
 To scrub down the floors.  
 You see 'twas a cleansing  
 Of souls, and a strengthening 470  
 Of spiritual union ;  
 Now, isn t that so ? "

" That's so," say the peasants,  
 But each to himself thinks,  
 " They needed persuading  
 With sticks though, I warrant,  
 To get them to pray  
 In your Lordship's fine manor ! "

" I'll say, without boasting,  
 They loved me—my peasants. 480  
 In my large Surminsky  
 Estate, where the peasants  
 Were mostly odd-jobbers,

<sup>1</sup> The Russians press their foreheads to the ground while worshipping.

Or very small tradesmen,  
It happened that they  
Would get weary of staying  
At home, and would ask  
My permission to travel,  
To visit strange parts  
At the coming of spring. 490  
They'd often be absent  
Through summer and autumn.  
My wife and the children  
Would argue while guessing  
The gifts that the peasants  
Would bring on returning.  
And really, besides  
Lawful dues of the 'Barin'  
In cloth, eggs, and live stock,  
The peasants would gladly 500  
Bring gifts to the family :  
Jam, say, from Kiev,  
From Astrakhan fish,  
And the richer among them  
Some silk for the lady.  
You see !—as he kisses  
Her hand he presents her  
A neat little packet !  
And then for the children  
Are sweetmeats and toys ; 510  
For me, the old toper,  
Is wine from St. Petersburg—  
Mark you, the rascal  
Won't go to the Russian  
For that ! He knows better—  
He runs to the Frenchman !  
And when we have finished  
Admiring the presents

I go for a stroll  
And a chat with the peasants ; 520  
They talk with me freely.  
My wife fills their glasses,  
My little ones gather  
Around us and listen,  
While sucking their sweets,  
To the tales of the peasants :  
Of difficult trading,  
Or places far distant,  
Of Petersburg, Astrakhan,  
Kazan, and Kiev. . . . 530  
On such terms it was  
That I lived with my peasants.  
Now, wasn't that nice ? ”

“ Yes,” answer the peasants ;  
“ Yes, well might one envy  
The noble Pomyéshchick !  
His life was so sweet  
There was no need to leave it.”

“ And now it is past. . . .  
It has vanished for ever ! 540  
Hark ! There's the bell tolling ! ”

They listen in silence :  
In truth, through the stillness,  
Which settles around them,  
The slow, solemn sound  
On the breeze of the morning  
Is borne from Kusminsky. . . .

“ Sweet peace to the peasant !  
God greet him in Heaven ! ”

The peasants say softly, 550  
 And cross themselves thrice ;  
 And the mournful Pomyéshchick  
 Uncovers his head,  
 As he piously crosses  
 Himself, and he answers :  
 “ ’Tis not for the peasant  
 The knell is now tolling,  
 It tolls the lost life  
 Of thè stricken Pomyéshchick.  
 Farewell to the past, 560  
 And farewell to thee, Russia,  
 The Russia who cradled  
 The happy Pomyéshchick,  
 Thy place has been stolen  
 And filled by another ! . . .  
 Heh, Proshka ! ” (‘The brandy  
 Is given, and quickly  
 He empties the glass.)  
 “ Oh, it isn’t consoling  
 To witness the change 570  
 In thy face, oh, my Motherland !  
 Truly one fancies  
 The whole race of nobles  
 Has suddenly vanished !  
 Wherever one goes, now,  
 One falls over peasants  
 Who lie about, tipsy,  
 One meets not a creature  
 But excise official,  
 Or stupid ‘ Posrédnik,’ <sup>1</sup> 580  
 Or Poles who’ve been banished.  
 One sees the troops passing,

<sup>1</sup> The official appointed to arrange terms between the Pomyéshchicks and their emancipated serfs.

And then one can guess  
That a village has somewhere  
Revolted, 'in thankful  
And dutiful spirit. . . .  
In old days, these roads  
Were made gay by the passing  
Of carriage, 'dormeuse,'  
And of six-in-hand coaches, 590  
And pretty, light troikas ;  
And in them were sitting  
The family troop  
Of the jolly Pomyéshchick  
The stout, buxom mother,  
The fine, roguish sons,  
And the pretty young daughters ;  
One heard with enjoyment  
The chiming of large bells,  
The tinkling of small bells, 600  
Which hung from the harness.  
And now ? . . . What distraction  
Has life ? And what joy  
Does it bring the Pomyéshchick ?  
At each step, you meet  
Something new to revolt you ;  
And when in the air  
You can smell a rank graveyard,  
You know you are passing  
A nobleman's manor ! 610  
My Lord ! . . . They have pillaged  
The beautiful dwelling !  
They've pulled it all down,  
Brick by brick, and have fashioned  
The bricks into hideously  
Accurate columns !  
The broad shady park

Of the outraged Pomyéshchick,  
 The fruit of a hundred years'  
 Careful attention, 620  
 Is falling away  
 'Neath the axe of a peasant !  
 The peasant works gladly,  
 And greedily reckons  
 The number of logs  
 Which his labour will bring him.  
 His dark soul is closed  
 To refinement of feeling,  
 And what would it matter  
 To him, if you told him 630  
 That this stately oak  
 Which his hatchet is felling  
 My grandfather's hand  
 Had once planted and tended ;  
 That under this ash-tree  
 My dear little children,  
 My Vera and Gánushka,  
 Echoed my voice  
 As they played by my side ;  
 That under this linden 640  
 My young wife confessed me  
 That little Gavrióushka,  
 Our best-beloved first-born,  
 Lay under her heart,  
 As she nestled against me  
 And bashfully hid  
 Her sweet face in my bosom:  
 As red as a cherry. . . .  
 It is to his profit  
 To ravish the park, 650  
 And his mission delights him.  
 It makes one ashamed now

To pass through a village ;  
The peasant sits still  
And he dreams not of bowing.

One feels in one's breast  
Not the pride of a noble  
But wrath and resentment.

The axe of the robber  
Resounds in the forest, 660  
It maddens your heart,

But you cannot prevent it,  
For who can you summon  
To rescue your forest ?

The fields are half-laboured,  
The seeds are half-wasted,  
No trace left of order. . . .

O Mother, my country,  
We do not complain  
For ourselves—of our sorrows, 670  
Our hearts bleed for thee :

Like a widow thou standest  
In helpless affliction

With tresses dishevelled  
And grief-stricken face. . .

They have blighted the forest,  
The noisy low taverns  
Have risen and flourished .

They've picked the most worthless  
And looted of the people, 680

And given them power  
In the posts of the Zemstvos ;

They've seized on the peasant  
And taught him his letters—

Much good may it do him !  
Your brow they have branded,  
As felons are branded,

As cattle are branded,  
 With these words they've stamped it :  
 ' To take away with you                      690  
   Or drink on the premises.'  
 Was it worth while, pray,  
   To weary the peasant  
 With learning his letters  
   In order to read them ?  
 The land that we keep  
   Is our mother no longer,  
 Our stepmother rather.  
   And then to improve things,  
 These pert good-for-nothings,                      700  
   These impudent writers  
 Must needs shout in chorus :  
   ' But whose fault, then, is it,  
 That you thus exhausted  
   An i wasted your country ? '  
 But I say—you duffers !  
   Who *could* foresee this ?  
 They babble, ' Enough  
   Of your lordly pretensions !  
 It's time that you learnt something,                      710  
   Lazy Pomyéshchicks !  
 Get up, now, and work ! '

" Work ! To whom, in God's name,  
 Do you think you are speaking ?  
   I am not a peasant  
 In ' laputs,' good madman !  
   I am—by God's mercy—  
 A Noble of Russia.  
   You take us for Germans !  
 We nobles have tender                      720  
   And delicate feelings,•



Our pride is inborn,  
And in Russia our classes  
Are not taught to work.  
Why, the meanest official  
Will not raise a finger  
To clear his own table,  
Or light his own stove !  
I can say, without boasting,  
That though I have lived 730  
Forty years in the country,  
And scarcely have left it,  
I could not distinguish  
Between rye and barley.  
And they sing of ' work ' to me !

" If we Pomyéshchicks  
Have really mistaken  
Our duty and calling,  
If really our mission  
Is not, as in old days, 740  
To keep up the hunting,  
To revel in luxury,  
Live on forced labour,  
Why did they not tell us  
Before ? Could I learn it ?  
For what do I see ?  
I've worn the Tsar's livery,  
' Sullied the Heavens,'  
And ' squandered the treasury  
Gained by the people,' 750  
And fully imagined  
To do so for ever.  
And now . . . God in Heaven ! . . ."  
The Barin is sobbing ! . . .

The kind-hearted peasants  
Can hardly help crying  
Themselves, and they think :  
“ Yes, the chain has been broken,  
The strong links have snapped,  
And the one end recoiling  
Has struck the Pomyéshchick,  
The other—the peasant.” 760

## PART II

### THE LAST POMYÉSHCHICK

#### PROLOGUE

THE day of St. Peter—  
And very hot weather ;  
The mowers are all  
At their work in the meadows.  
The peasants are passing  
A tumble-down village,  
Called “ Ignorant-Duffers,”  
Of Volost “ Old-Dustmen,”  
Of Government “ Know-Nothing.”  
They are approaching 10  
The banks of the Volga.  
They come to the river,  
The sea-gulls are wheeling  
And flashing above it ;  
The sea-mens are walking  
About on the sand-banks ;  
And in the bare hayfields,  
Which look just as naked  
As any youth’s cheek  
After yesterday’s shaving, 20  
The Princes Volkonsky <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The haystacks.

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Are haughtily standing,  
And round them their children.  
Who (unlike all others)  
Are born at an earlier  
Date than their sires.

“The fields are enormous,”  
Remarks old Pakhóm,  
“Why, the folk must be giants.”

The two brothers Goóbin 30

Are smiling at something ;  
For some time they've noticed

A very tall peasant  
Who stands with a pitcher  
On top of a haystack ;

He drinks, and a woman  
Below, with a hay-fork,  
Is looking at him

With her head leaning back.  
The peasants walk on 40

Till they come to the haystack ;  
The man is still drinking ;

They pass it quite slowly,  
Go fifty steps farther,

Then all turn together  
And look at the haystack.

Not much has been altered :

The peasant is standing  
With body bent back

As before.—but the pitcher 50  
Has turned bottom upwards. . .

The strangers go farther.

The camps are thrown out  
On the banks of the river ;  
And there the old people

And children are gathered,  
 And horses are waiting  
 With big empty waggons ;  
 And then, in the fields  
 Behind those that are finished, 60  
 The distance is filled  
 By the army of workers,  
 The white shirts of women,  
 The men's brightly coloured,  
 And voices and laughter,  
 With all intermingled  
 The hum of the scythes. . . .

“ God help you, good fellows ! ”  
 “ Our thanks to you, brothers ! ”

The peasants stand noting 70  
 The long line of mowers,  
 The poise of the scythes  
 And their sweep through the sunshine.  
 The rhythmical swell  
 Of melodious murmur.

The timid grass stands  
 For a moment, and trembles,  
 Then falls with a sigh. . . ,

On the banks of the Volga  
 The grass has grown high 80  
 And the mowers work gladly.  
 The peasants soon feel  
 That they cannot resist it.  
 “ It's long since we've stretched ourselves,  
 Come, let us help you ! ”  
 And now seven women

Have yielded their places.  
 The spirit of work  
 Is devouring our peasants ;  
 Like teeth in a ravenous  
 Mouth they are working— 90  
 The muscular arms,  
 And the long grass is falling  
 To songs that are strange  
 To this part of the country,  
 To songs that are taught  
 By the blizzards and snow-storms,  
 The wild savage winds  
 Of the peasants' own homelands  
 "Bleak," "Burnt-Out," and "Hungry," 100  
 "Patched," "Bare-Foot," and "Shabby,"  
 And "Harvestless," too. . . .  
 And when the strong craving  
 For work is appeased  
 They sit down by a haystack.

"From whence have you come ?"  
 A grey-headed old peasant  
 (The one whom the women  
 Call Vlásuchka) asks them,  
 "And where are you going ?" 110

"We are—" say the peasants,  
 Then suddenly stop,  
 There's some music approaching !

"Oh, that's the Pomyéshchick  
 Returning from boating !"  
 Says Vlásuchka, running  
 To busy the mowers :  
 "Wake up ! Look alive there !  
 And mind—above all things,

## PROLOGUE

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Don't heat the Pomyéshchick 120  
 And don't make him angry !  
 And if he abuse you,  
 Bow low and say nothing,  
 And if he should praise you,  
 Start lustily cheering.  
 You women, stop cackling !  
 And get to your forks !"  
 A big burly peasant  
 With beard long and bushy  
 Bestirs himself also 130  
 'To busy them all,  
 Then puts on his "kaftan,"<sup>1</sup>  
 And runs away quickly  
 To meet the Pomyéshchick.

And now to the bank-side  
 Three boats are approaching.  
 In one sit the servants  
 And band of musicians,  
 Most busily playing ;  
 The second one groans 140  
 'Neath a mountainous wet-nurse,  
 Who dandles a baby,  
 A withered old dry-nurse,  
 A motionless body  
 Of ancient retainers.  
 And then in the third  
 There are sitting the gentry :  
 Two beautiful ladies  
 (One slender and fair-haired,  
 One heavy and black-browed) 150  
 And two moustached Barins  
 And three little Barins,  
<sup>1</sup> A long-skirted coat.

And last—the Pomyéshchick,  
 A very old man  
 Wearing long white moustaches  
 (He seems to be all white);  
 His cap, broad and high-crowned,  
 Is white, with a peak,  
 In the front, of red satin.

His body is lean 160  
 As a hare's in the winter.

His nose like a hawk's beak,  
 His eyes—well, they differ :

The one sharp and shining,  
 The other—the left eye—

Is sightless and blank,  
 Like a dull leaden farthing.

Some woolly white poodles  
 With tufts on their ankles  
 Are in the boat too. 170

The old man alighting  
 Has mounted the bank,  
 Where for long he reposes  
 Upon a red carpet  
 Spread out by the servants.  
 And then he arises

To visit the mowers,  
 To pass through the fields  
 On a tour of inspection.

He leans on the arm— 180

Now of one of the Barins,  
 And now upon those  
 Of the beautiful ladies.

And so with his suite—  
 With the three little Barins,  
 The wet-nurse, the dry-nurse,



The ancient retainers,  
 The woolly white poodles,—  
 Along through the hayfields  
 Proceeds the Pomyésnchick. 190

The peasants on all sides  
 Bow down to the ground ;  
 And the big, burly peasant  
 (The Elder he is  
 As the peasants have noticed)  
 Is cringing and bending  
 Before the Pomyéshchick,  
 Just like the Big Devil  
 Before the high altar :  
 “ Just so ! Yes, Your Highness, 200  
 It’s done, at your bidding ! ”  
 I think he will soon fall  
 Before the Pomyéshchick  
 And roll in the dust. . . .

So moves the procession,  
 Until it stops short  
 In the front of a haystack  
 Of wonderful size,  
 Only this day erected.  
 The old man is poking 210  
 His forefinger in it,  
 He thinks it is damp,  
 And he blazes with fury :  
 “ Is this how you rot  
 The best goods of your master ?  
 I’ll rot you with barschin,<sup>1</sup>  
 I’ll make you repent it !  
 Undo it—at once ! ”

<sup>1</sup> The forced labour of the serfs for their owners.

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The Elder is writhing  
In great agitation : 220

“I was not quite careful  
Enough and it *is* damp.

It's my fault, Your Highness ! ”

He summons the peasants,  
Who run with their pitchforks  
To punish the monster.

And soon they have spread it  
In small heaps around,

At the feet of the master ;  
His wrath is appeased. 230

(In the meantime the strangers  
Examine the hay—

It's like tinder—so dry !)

A lackey comes flying  
Along, with a napkin ;  
He's lame—the poor man !

“ Please, the luncheon is served.”  
And then the procession,

The three little Barins,  
The wet-nurse, the dry-nurse, 240

The ancient retainers,  
The woolly white poodles,  
Moves onward to lunch.

The peasants stand watching ;  
From one of the boats  
Comes an outburst of music  
To greet the Pomyéshchick.

The table is shining  
All dazzlingly white

# PROLOGUE ·

123

On the bank of the river. 250  
 The strangers, astonished,  
 Draw near to old Vlásuchka ;  
 “ Pray, little Uncle,”  
 They say, “ what’s the meaning  
 Of all these strange doings ?  
 And who is that curious  
 Old man ? ”

“ Our Pomyéshchick,  
 The great Prince Yutiátin.”

“ But why is he fussing 260  
 About in that manner ?  
 For things are all changed now,  
 And he seems to think  
 They are still as of old.  
 The hay is quite dry,  
 Yet he told you to dry it ! ”

“ But funnier still  
 That the hay and the hayfields  
 Are not his at all.”

“ Then whose are they ? ” 270

“ The Commune’s.”

“ Then why is he poking  
 His nose into matters  
 Which do not concern him ?  
 For are you not free ? ”

“ Why, yes, by God’s mercy  
 The order is changed now  
 For us as for others ;  
 But ours is a special case.”

“ Tell us about it.” 280

The old man lay down  
 At the foot of the haystack  
 And answered them—nothing.

The peasants producing  
 The magic white napkin  
 Sit down and say softly,  
 “O napkin enchanted,  
 Give food to the peasants !”  
 The napkin unfolds,  
 And two hands, which come floating  
 From no one sees where, 291  
 Place a bucket of vodka,  
 A large pile of bread .  
 On the magic white napkin,  
 And dwindle away. . . .

The peasants, still wishing  
 To question old Vlásuchka,  
 Wisely present him  
 A cupful of vodka .  
 “Now come, little Uncle, 300  
 Be gracious to strangers,  
 And tell us your story.”

“There’s nothing to tell you.  
 You haven’t told me yet  
 Who *you* are and whence  
 You have journeyed to these parts,  
 And whither you go.”

“We, will not be surly  
 Like you. We will tell you.  
 We’ve come a great distance, 310  
 And seek to discover  
 A thing of importance.

A trouble torments us,  
 It draws us away  
 From our work, from our homes,  
 From the love of our food. . . .”  
 The peasants then tell him  
 About their chance meeting,  
 Their argument, quarrel,  
 Their vow, and decision ; 320  
 Of how they had sought  
 In the Government “Tight-Squeeze”  
 And Government “Shot-Strewn”  
 The man who, in Russia,  
 Is happy and free. . . .

Old Vlásuchka listens,  
 Observing them keenly.  
 “I see,” he remarks,  
 When the story is finished,  
 “I see you are very 330  
 Peculiar people.  
 We’re said to be strange here  
 But you are still stranger.”

“Well, drink some more vodka  
 And tell us your tale.”

And when by the vodka  
 His tongue becomes loosened,  
 Old Vlásuchka tells them  
 The following story.

## I

## THE DIE-HARD

" The great prince, Yutiátin,  
 The ancient Pomyéshchick,  
 Is very eccentric.  
 His wealth is untold,  
 And his titles exalted,  
 His family ranks  
 With the first in the Empire.  
 The whole of his life  
 He has spent in amusement,  
 Has known no control 10  
 Save his own will and pleasure.  
 When we were set free  
 He refused to believe it :  
 ' They lie ! the low scoundrels ! '  
 There came the posrédnik  
 And Chief of Police,  
 But he would not admit them,  
 He ordered them out  
 And went on as before,  
 And only became 20  
 Full of hate and suspicion :  
 ' Bow low, or I'll flog you  
 To death, without mercy ! '  
 The Governor himself came  
 To try to explain things,  
 And long they disputed  
 And argued together ;  
 The furious voice  
 Of the prince was heard raging  
 All over the house, 30  
 And he got so excited

That on the same evening  
A stroke fell upon him :  
His left side went dead,  
Black as earth, so they tell us,  
And all over nothing !  
It wasn't his pocket  
That pinched, but his pride  
That was touched and enraged him  
He lost but a mite 40  
And would never have missed it "

" Ah, that's what it means, friends,  
To be a Pomyéshchick,  
The habit gets into  
The blood," says Mitródor,  
" And not the Pomyéshchick's  
Alone, for the habit  
Is strong in the peasant  
As well," old Pakhóm said.  
" I once on suspicion 50  
Was put into prison,  
And met there a peasant  
Called Sédor, a strange man,  
Arrested for horse-stealing,  
If I remember ;  
And he from the prison  
Would send to the Barin  
His taxes. (The prisoner's  
Income is scanty,  
He gets what he begs 60  
Or a trifle for working.)  
The others all laughed at him ;  
Why should you send them  
And you off for life  
To hard labour ? ' they asked him.

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But he only said,  
 ‘ All the same . . . it is better.’ ”

“ Well, now, little Uncle,  
 Go on with the story.”

“ A mite is a small thing, 70  
 Except when it happens  
 To be in the eye !

The Pomyéshchick lay senseless,  
 And many were sure  
 That he'd never recover  
 His children were sent for,  
 Those black-moustached footguards  
 (You saw them just now

With their wives, the fine ladies),  
 The eldest of them 80

Was to settle all matters  
 Concerning his father.

He called the posrédnik  
 To draw up the papers

And sign the agreement,  
 When suddenly—there

Stands the old man before them !  
 He springs on them straight

Like a wounded old tiger,  
 He bell ws like thunder. 90

It was but a short time  
 Ago, and it happened

That I was then Elder,  
 And chance'd to have entered

The house on some errand,  
 And I heard myself

How he cursed the Pomyéshchicks ;  
 The words that he spoke

I have never forgottèn :



' The Jews are reproached 100  
 For betraying their Master ;  
 But what are *you* doing ?  
 The rights of the nobles  
 By centuries sanctioned  
 You fling to the beggars ! '  
 He said to his sons,  
 ' Oh, you dastardly cowards !  
 My children no longer !  
 It is for small reptiles—  
 The pope's crawling breed— 110  
 To take bribes from vile traitors,  
 To purchase base peasants,  
 And they may be pardoned !  
 But you !—you have sprung  
 From the house of Yutiátin,  
 The Princes Yu-tiá-tin  
 You are ! Go ! . . . Go, leave me !  
 You pitiful puppies ! '  
 The heirs were alarmed ;  
 How to tide matters over 120  
 Until he should die ? '  
 For they are not small items,  
 The forests and lands  
 That belong to our father ;  
 His money-bags are not 2  
 So light as to make it  
 A question of nothing  
 Whose shoulders shall bear them ;  
 We know that our father  
 Has three ' private ' daughters 130  
 In Petersburg living,  
 To Generals married,  
 So how do we know  
 That they may not inherit

# 130. THE LAST POMYÉSHCHICK

His wealth ? . . . The Pomyéshchick  
 Once more is prostrated,  
 His death is a question  
 Of time, and to make it  
 Run smoothly till then  
 An agreement was come to, 140  
 A plan to deceive him :  
 So one of the ladies  
 (The fair one, I fancy,  
 She used at that time  
 To attend the old master  
 And rub his left side  
 With a brush), well, she told him  
 That orders had come  
 From the Government lately  
 That peasants set free 150  
 Should return to their bondage.  
 And he quite believed it.  
 (You see, since his illness  
 The Prince had become  
 Like a child.) When he heard it  
 He cried with delight ;  
 And the household was summoned  
 To prayer round the icons ; <sup>1</sup>  
 And Thanksgiving Service  
 Was held by his orders 160  
 In every small village,  
 And bells were set ringing.  
 And little by little  
 His strength returned partly,  
 And then as before  
 It was hunting and music,  
 The servants were caned

<sup>1</sup> Holy images.

And the peasants were punished.

The heirs had, of course,  
Set things right with the servants, 170

A good understanding  
They came to, and one man  
(You saw him go running  
Just now with the napkin)

Did not need persuading—  
He so loved his Barin.

His name is Ipát,  
And when we were made free

He refused to believe it ;  
' The great Prince Yutiátin 180

Be left without peasants !  
What pranks are you playing ? '

At last, when the ' Order  
Of Freedom ' was shown him,

Ipát said, ' Well, well,  
Get you gone to your pleasures,

But I am the slave  
Of the Princes Yutiátin ! '

He cannot get over  
The old Prince's kindness 190

To him, and he's told us  
Some curious stories

Of things that had happened  
To him in his childhood,

His youth and old age.  
(You see, I had often

To go to the Prince  
On some matter or other

Concerning the peasants,  
And waited and waited 200

For hours in the kitchens,  
And so I have heard them

A hundred times over.)  
 ' When I was a young man  
 Our gracious young Prince  
 Spent his holidays sometimes  
 At home, and would dip me  
 (His meanest slave, mind you)  
 Right under the ice  
 In the depths of the Winter. 210  
 He did it in such  
 A remarkable way, too !  
 He first made two holes  
 In the ice of the river,  
 In one he would lower  
 Me down in a net—  
 Pull me up through the other !'  
 And when I began  
 To grow old, it would happen  
 That sometimes I drove 220  
 With the Prince in the Winter ;  
 The snow would block up  
 Half the road, and we used  
 To drive five-in-a-file.  
 Then the fancy would strike him  
 (How whimsical, mark you !)  
 To set me astride  
 On the horse which was leading,  
 Me—last of his slaves !  
 Well, he dearly loved music, 230  
 And so he would throw me  
 A fiddle : " Here : play now,  
 Ipát." Then the driver  
 Would shout to the horses,  
 And urge them to gallop.  
 The snow would half-blind me,  
 My hands with the music

Were occupied both ;  
So what with the jolting,  
The snow, and the fiddle, 240  
Ipát, like a sil'y  
Old noodle, would tumble.  
Of course, if he landed  
Right under the horses  
The sledge must go over  
His ribs,—who could help it ?  
But that was a trifle ;  
The cold was the worst thing,  
It bites you, and you  
Can do nothing against it ! 250  
The snow lay all round  
On the vast empty desert,  
I lay looking up  
At the stars and confessing  
My sins. But—my friends,  
This is true as the Gospel—  
I heard before long  
How the sledge-bells came ringing,  
Drew near-er and nearer :  
The Prince had remembered, 260  
And come back to fetch me !'

“(The tears began falling  
And rolled down his face  
At this part of the story.  
Whenever he told it  
He always would cry  
Upon coming to this !)  
' He covered me up  
With some rugs, and he warmed me,  
He lifted me up, 270  
And he placed me beside him,

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Me—last of his slaves—

Beside his Princely Person !  
And so we came home.’ ”

They’re amused at the story.

Old Vlásuchka, when

He has emptied his fourth cup,  
Continues : “ The heirs came

And called us together—

The peasants and servants ; 280

They said, ‘ We’re distressed  
On account of our father.

These changes will kill him,  
He cannot sustain them.

So humour his weakness :

Keep silent, and act still

As if all this trouble

Had never existed ;

Give way to him, bow to him

Just as in old days. 290

For each stroke of barschin,

For all needless labour,

For every rough word

We will richly reward you.

He cannot live long now,

The doctors have told us

That two or three months

Is the most we may hope for

Act kindly towards us,

And do as we ask you, 300

And we as the price

Of your silence will give you

The layfields which lie

On the banks of the Volga.

Think well of our offer,

And let the posrédnik  
Be sent for to witness  
And settle the matter.'

"Then gathered the commune  
To argue and clamour ; 310  
The thought of the hayfields  
(In which we are sitting),  
With promises boundless  
And plenty of vodka,  
Decided the question :  
The commune would wait  
For the death of the Barin.

"Then came the posrédnik,  
And laughing, he said :  
'It's a capital notion ! 320  
The hayfields are fine, too,  
You lose nothing by it ;  
You just play the fool  
And the Lord will forgive you.  
You know, it's forbidden  
To no one in Russia  
To bow and be silent.'

"But I was against it :  
I said to the peasants, '  
'For you it is easy, 330  
But how about me ?  
Whatever may happen  
The Elder must come  
To accounts with the Barin,  
And how can I answer  
His babyish questions ?  
And how can I do  
His nonsensical bidding ?'





I swear I'll establish  
Such order amongst you  
You'll die of the fun ! '

"The commune took long  
To consider this offer :  
A desperate fellow  
Is Klímka the peasant,  
A drunkard, a rover, 380  
And not very honest,  
No lover of work,  
And acquainted with gipsies ;  
A vagabond, knowing  
A lot about horses.  
A scoffer at those  
Who work hard, he will tell you  
' At work you will never  
Get rich, my fine fellow ;  
You'll never get rich,— 390  
But you're sure to get crippled ! '  
But he, all the same,  
Is well up in his letters ;  
Has been to St. Petersburg.  
Yes, and to Moscow,  
And once to Siberia, too,  
With the merchants.  
A pity it was  
That he ever returned !  
He's clever enough, 400  
But he can't keep a far thing ;  
He's sharp—but he's always  
In some kind of trouble.  
He's picked some fine words up  
From out of his travels :  
' Our Fatherland dear,'

And 'The soul of great Russia,'  
 And 'Moscow, the mighty,  
 Illustrious city!'

'And I,' he will shew it, 410  
 'Am a plain Russian peasant!'  
 And striking his forehead  
 He'll swallow the vodka.

A bottle at once  
 He'll consume, like a mouthful.  
 He'll fall at your feet  
 For a bottle of vodka.

But if he has money  
 He'll share with you, freely ;  
 The first man he meets 420  
 May partake of his drink.

He's clever at shouting  
 And cheating and fooling,  
 At showing the best side  
 Of goods which are rotten,  
 At boasting and lying ;  
 And when he is caught  
 He'll slip out through a cranny,  
 And throw you a jest,  
 Or his favourite saying : 430

'A crack in the jaw  
 Will your honesty bring you!'

"Well, after much thinking  
 The commune decided  
 That I must remain  
 The responsible Elder ;

But Klímka might act  
 In my stead to the Barin  
 As though he were Elder.  
 Why, then, let him do it ! 440

The right kind of Elder  
He is for his Barin,  
They make a fine pair !  
Like pretty his conscience ;  
Like Meenin's <sup>1</sup> his beard,  
So that looking upon him  
You'd think a sedater,  
More dutiful peasant  
Could never be found.  
The heirs made his kaftan, 450  
And he put it on,  
And from Klimka the ' scapegrace '  
He suddenly changed  
Into Klím, Son-of-Jacob,<sup>2</sup>  
Most worthy of Elders.  
So that's how it is ;—  
And to our great misfortune  
The Barin is ordered  
A carriage-drive daily.  
Each day through the village 460  
He drives in a carriage  
That's built upon springs.  
Then up you jump, quickly,  
And whip off your hat,  
And, God knows for what reason,  
He'll jump down your throat,  
He'll upbraid and abuse you ;  
But you must keep silent.  
He watches a peasant  
At work in the fields, 470

<sup>1</sup> Meenin—a famous Russian patriot in the beginning of the seventeenth century. He is always represented with an immense beard.

<sup>2</sup> It is a sign of respect to address a person by his own name and the name of his father

And he swears we are lazy  
 And lie-abed sluggards  
 (Though never worked peasant  
 With half such a will ,

In the time of the Barin).  
 He has not a notion

That they are not *his* fields,  
 But ours. When we gather

We laugh, for each peasant  
 Has something to tell 480

Of the crazy Pomyéshchick ;  
 His ears burn, I warrant,

When we come together !

And Klím, Son-of-Jacob,

Will run, with the manner  
 Of bearing the commune

Some news of importance  
 (The pig has got proud

Since he's taken to scratching  
 His sides on the steps 490

Of the nobleman's manor).

He runs and he shouts :

' A command to the commune !

I told the Pomyéshchick

That Widow Teréntevna's

Cottage had fallen.

And that she is begging

Her bread. He commands you:

To marry the widow

To Gabriel Jóckoff ; 500

To rebuild the cottage,

And let them reside there

And 'multiply freely.'

"The bride will be seventy,

Seven the bridegroom !  
 Well, who could help laughing ?  
 Another command :

‘ The dull-witted cows,  
 Driven out before sunrise,  
 Awoke the Pomyéshchick 510  
 By foolishly mooing  
 While passing his courtyard.  
 The cow-herd is ordered  
 To see that the cows  
 Do not moo in that manner ! ’

The peasants laugh loudly.

“ But why do you laugh so ?  
 We all have our fancies.

Yakútsk was once governed,  
 I heard, by a General ; 520  
 He had a liking

For sticking live cows  
 Upon spikes round the city,  
 And every free spot

Was adorned in that manner,  
 As Petersburg is,

So they say, with its statues,  
 Before it had entered

The heads of the people  
 That he was a madman. 530

“ Another strict order  
 Was sent to the commune :

‘ The dog which belongs  
 To Sofrónoff the watchman  
 Does not behave nicely,  
 It barked at the Barin.

Be therefore Sofrónoff  
 Dismissed. Let Evrémka  
 Be watchman to guard  
 The estate of the Barin.' 540  
 (Another loud laugh,  
 For Evrémka, the 'simple,'  
 Is known as the deaf-mute  
 And fool of the village).  
 But Klímka's delighted :  
 At last he's found something  
 That suits him exactly.  
 He bustles about  
 And in everything meddles,  
 And even drinks less. 550  
 There's a sharp little woman  
 Whose name is Orévna,  
 And she is Klím's gossip,  
 And finely she helps him  
 To fool the old Barin.  
 And as to the women,  
 They're living in clover :  
 They run to the manor  
 With linen and mushrooms  
 And strawberries, knowing 560  
 The ladies will buy them  
 And pay what they ask them  
 And feed them besides.  
 We laughed and made game  
 Till we fell into danger  
 And nearly were lost :  
 There was one man among us,  
 Petrov, an ungracious  
 And bitter-tongued peasant ;  
 He never forgave us 570  
 Because we'd consented

To humour the Barin.

‘The ‘Tsar,’ he would say,

‘Has had mercy upon you,

And now, you, yourselves

Lift the load to your backs.

To Hell with the hayfields !

We want no more masters !’

We only could stop him

By giving him vodka

580

(His weakness was vodka).

The devil must needs

Fling him straight at the Barin.

One morning Petrov

Had set out to the forest

To pilfer some logs

(For the night would not serve him,

It seems, for his thieving,

He must go and do it

In broadest white daylight),

590

And there comes the carriage,

On springs, with the Barin !

“ ‘ From whence, little peasant,  
That beautiful tree-trunk ?

From whence has it come ? ’

He knew, the old fellow,

From whence it had come.

Petrov stood there silent,

And what could he answer ?

He’d taken the tree

600

From the Barin’s own forest.

“The Barin already

Is bursting with anger ;

He nags and reproaches,





They, too, are bewildered,  
They run to the peasant  
And try to restrain him. 640

“ He bellows, ‘ I’ll kill you !  
For what are you swollen  
With pride, you old dotard,  
You scum of the pig-sty ?  
Have done with your jabber !  
You’ve lost your strong grip  
On the soul of the peasant,  
The last one you are.  
By the will of the peasant  
Because he is foolish 650  
They treat you as master  
To-day. But to-morrow  
The ball will be ended ;  
A good kick behind  
We will give the Pomyéshchick,  
And tail between legs  
Send him back to his dwelling  
To leave us in peace ! ’

“ The Barin is gasping,  
‘ You rebel . . . you rebel ! ’ 660  
He trembles all over,  
Half-dead he has fallen,  
And lies on the earth !

“ The end ! think the others,  
The black-moustached footguards,  
The beautiful ladies ;  
But they are mistaken ;  
It isn’t the end.

“An order : to summon  
The village together 670  
To witness the punishment  
Dealt to the rebel

Before the Pomyéshchick. . . .  
The heirs and the ladies  
Come running in terror  
To Klím, to Petrov,  
And to me : ‘ Only save us ! ’  
Their faces are pale,  
‘ If the trick is discovered  
We’re lost ! ’ 680

It is Klím’s place  
To deal with the matter :

He drinks with Petrov  
All day long, till the evening,  
Embracing him fondly.  
Together till midnight

They pace round the village,  
At midnight start drinking  
Again till the morning.

Petrov is as tipsy 690

As ever man was,  
And like that he is brought  
To the Barin’s large courtyard,  
And all is perfection !

The Barin can’t move  
From the balcony, thanks  
To his yesterday’s shaking.  
And Klím is well pleased.

“He leads Petrov into  
The stable and sets him 700  
In front of a gallon  
Of vodka, and tells him :

‘ Now, drink and start crying,  
“ Oh, oh, little Fathers !  
Oh oh, little Mothers !  
Have mercy ! Have mercy ! ” ’

“ Petrov does his bidding ;  
He howls, and the Barin,  
Perched up on the balcony,  
Listens in rapture. 710

He drinks in the sound  
Like the loveliest music.  
And who could help laughing  
To hear him exclaiming,  
‘ Don’t spare him, the villain !  
The im-pu-dent rascal !

Just teach him a lesson ! ’  
Petrov yells aloud  
Till the vodka is finished.  
Of course in the end 720  
He is perfectly helpless,  
And four peasants carry him  
Out of the stable.

His state is so sorry  
That even the Barin  
Has pity upon him,  
And says to him sweetly,  
‘ Your own fault it is,  
Little peasant, you know ! ’ ”

“ You see what a kind heart 730  
He has, the Pomyésłchick,”  
Says Prov, and old Vlásuchka  
Answers him quietly,  
“ A saying there is :  
‘ Praise the grass—in the haystack,  
The lord—in his coffin.’

'Twere well if God took him.

Petrov is no longer

Alive. That same evening

He started up, raving,

740

At midnight the pope came,

And just as the day dawned

He died. He was buried,

A cross set above him,

And God alone knows

What he died of. It's certain

That we never touched him,

Nay, not with a finger,

Much less with a stick.

Yet sometimes the thought comes :

Perhaps if that accident

751

Never had happened

Petrov would be living.

You see, friends, the peasant

Was proud more than others,

He carried his head high,

And never had bent it,

And now of a sudden—

Lie down for the Barin !

Fall flat for his pleasure !

760

The thing went off well,

But Petrov had not wished it.

I think he was frightened

To anger the commune

By not giving in,

And the commune is foolish,

It soon will destroy you. . . .

The ladies were ready

To kiss the old peasant,

They brought fifty roubles

770

For him, and some dainties.

'Twas Klímka, the scamp,  
The unscrupulous sinner,  
Who worked his undoing. . . .

“ A servant is coming  
To us from the Barin,  
They've finished their lunch.  
Perhaps they have sent him  
To summon the Elder.  
I'll go and look on  
At the comedy there.”

780

## II

## KLÍM, THE ELDER

With him go the strangers,  
And some of the women  
And men follow after,  
For mid-day has sounded  
Their rest-time it is,  
So they gather together  
To stare at the gentry,  
To whisper and wonder.  
They stand in a row  
At a dutiful distance  
Away from the Prince. . . .

10

At a long snowy table  
Quite covered with bottles  
And all kinds of dishes  
Are sitting the gentry,  
The old Prince presiding  
In dignified state

At the head of the table ;  
 All white, dressed in white,  
     With his face shrunk awry, 20  
 His dissimilar eyes ;  
     In his button-hole fastened  
 A little white cross  
     (It's the cross of St. George,  
 Some one says in a whisper) ;  
 And standing behind him,  
     Ipat, the domestic,  
 The faithful old servant,  
 In white tie and shirt-front  
     Is brushing the flies off. 30  
 Beside the Pomyéshchick  
     On each hand are sitting  
 The beautiful ladies :  
     The one with black tresses,  
 Her lips red as beetroots,  
     Each eye like an apple ;  
 The other, the fair-haired,  
     With yellow locks streaming.  
 (On, you yellow locks,  
     Like spun gold do you glisten 40  
 And glow, in the sunshine !)  
 Then perched on three high chairs  
 The three little Barins,  
     Each wearing his napkin  
 Tucked under his chin,  
     With the old nurse beside them,  
 And further the body  
     Of ancient retainers ;  
 And facing the Prince  
     At the foot of the table, 50  
 The black-moustached footguards  
     Are sitting together.

Behind each chair standing  
 A young girl is serving,  
 And women are waving  
 The flies off with branches.  
 The woolly white poodles  
 Are under the table,  
 The three little Barins  
 Are teasing them slyly.

60

Before the Pomyéshchick,  
 Bare-headed and humble,  
 The Elder is standing.  
 "Now tell me, how soon  
 Will the mowing be finished ?"  
 The Barin says, talking  
 And eating at once.

"It soon will be finished.  
 Three days of the week  
 Do we work for your Highness ; 70  
 A man with a horse,  
 And a youth or a woman,  
 And half an old woman  
 From every allotment.  
 To-day for this week  
 Is the Barin's term finished."

"Tut tut !" says the Barin,  
 Like one who has noticed  
 Some crafty intent  
 On the part of another.

80

" 'The Barin's term,' say you ?  
 Now, what do you mean, pray ?"  
 The eye which is bright  
 He has fixed on the peasant.

The Elder is hanging  
His head in confusion.

“Of course it must be  
As your Highness may order.

In two or three days,  
If the weather be gracious, 90

The hay of your Highness  
Can surely be gathered.

That's so,—is it not ? ”

(He turns his broad face round  
And looks at the peasants.)

And then the sharp woman,

Klím's gossip, Grévna,  
Makes answer for them :

“Yes, Klím, Son-of-Jacob,

The hay of the Barin 100  
Is surely more precious

Than ours. We must tend it  
As long as the weather lasts ;

Ours may come later.”

“A woman she is,  
But more clever than you,”

The Pomyéshchick says smiling,  
And then of a sudden

Is snaken with laughter :  
“Ha, ha ! Oh, you blockhead ! 110

Ha, ha ! fool ! fool ! fool !  
It's the ‘Barin's term,’ say you ?

Ha, ha ! fool, ha, ha !  
The Barin's term, slave,

Is the whole of your life-time ,  
And you have forgotten

That I, by God's mercy,



By Tsar's ancient charter,  
By birth and by merit,  
Am your supreme master ! ” 120

The strangers remark here  
That Vlásuchka gently  
Slips down to the grass.

“ What's that for ? ” they ask him.  
“ We may as well rest now ;  
He's off. You can't stop him.  
For since it was rumoured  
That we should be given  
Our freedom, the Barin  
Takes care to remind us 130  
That till the last hour  
On the world will the peasant  
Be clenched in the grip  
Of the nobles.” And really  
An hour slips away  
And the Prince is still speaking ;  
His tongue will not always  
Obey him, he splutters  
And hisses, falls over  
His words, and his right eye 140  
So shares his disquiet  
That it trembles and twitches.  
The left eye expands,  
Grows as round as an owl's eye,  
Revolves like a wheel.  
The rights of his Fathers  
Through ages respected,  
His services, merits,  
His name and possessions,  
The Barin rehearses. 150

154 THE LAST POMYÉSHCHICK

God's curse, the Tsar's anger,  
 He hurls at the heads  
 Of obstreperous peasants.  
 And strictly gives order  
 To sweep from the commune  
 All senseless ideas,  
 Bids the peasants remember  
 That they are his slaves  
 And must honour their master.

“ Our Fathers,” cried Klím, 160  
 And his voice sounded strangely,  
 It rose to a squeak  
 As if all things within him  
 Leapt up with a passionate  
 Joy of a sudden  
 At thought of the mighty  
 And noble Pomyéshchicks,  
 ‘ And whom should we serve  
 Save the Master we cherish ?  
 And whom should we honour ? 170  
 In whom should we hope ?  
 We feed but on sorrows,  
 We bathe but in tear-drops,  
 How can we rebel ?

“ Our tumble-down hovels,  
 Our weak little bodies,  
 Ourselves, we are yours,  
 We belong to our Master.  
 The seeds which we sow  
 In the earth, and the harvest, 180  
 The hair on our heads—  
 All belongs to the Master.  
 Our ancestors fallen  
 To dust in their coffins,

Our feeble old parents  
Who nod on the oven,  
Our little ones lying  
Asleep in their cradles  
Are yours—are our Master's,  
And we in our homes 190  
Use our wills but as freely  
As fish in a net."

The words of the Elder  
Have pleased the Pomyéshchick,  
The right eye is gazing  
Benignantly at him,  
The left has grown smaller  
And peaceful again  
Like the moon in the heavens.  
He pours out a goblet 200  
Of red foreign wine :  
" Drink," he says to the peasant.  
The rich wine is burning  
Like blood in the sunshine ;  
Klím drinks without protest.  
Again he is speaking :

" Our Fathers," he says,  
" By your mercy we live now  
As though in the bosom,  
Of Christ. Let the peasant 210  
But try to exist  
Without grace from the Barin !"  
(He sips at the goblet )  
" The whole world would perish  
If not for the Barin's  
Deep wisdom and learning,  
If not for the peasant's  
Most humble submission.

By birth, and God's holy  
 Decree you are bidden 220  
 To govern the stupid  
 And ignorant peasant ;  
 By God's holy will  
 Is the peasant commanded  
 To honour and cherish  
 And work for his lord ! ”

And here the old servant,  
 Ipát, who is standing  
 Behind the Pomyéshchick  
 And waving his branches, 230  
 Begins to sob loudly,  
 The tears streaming down  
 O'er his withered old face :  
 “ Let us pray that the Barin  
 For many long years  
 May be spared to his servants ! ”  
 The simpleton blubbers,  
 The loving old servant,  
 And raising his hand,  
 Weak and trembling, he crosses 240  
 Himself without ceasing.  
 The black-moustached footguards  
 Look sourly upon him  
 With secret displeasure.  
 But how can they help it ?  
 So off come their hats  
 And they cross themselves also.  
 And then the old Prince  
 And the wrinkled old dry-nurse  
 Both sign themselves thrice, 250  
 And the Elder does likewise.

He winks to the woman,  
 His sharp little gossip,  
 And straightway the women,  
 Who nearer and nearer  
 Have drawn to the table,  
 Begin most devoutly  
 To cross themselves too.  
 And one begins sobbing  
 In just such a manner 260  
 As had the old servant.  
 ("That's right, now, start whining,  
 Old Widow Teréntevna,  
 Sill-y old noodle !"  
 Says Vlásucnka, crossly.)

The red sun peeps slyly  
 At them from a cloud,  
 And the slow, dreamy music  
 Is heard from the river . . .

The ancient Pomyéshch'ck 270  
 Is moved, and the right eye  
 Is blinded with tears,  
 Till the golden-haired lady  
 Removes them and dries it ;  
 She kisses the other eye '  
 Heartily too.

"You see !" then remarks  
 The old man to his children,  
 The two stalwart sons  
 And the pretty young ladies ; 280  
 "I wish that those villains,  
 Those Petersburg liars

Who say we are tyrants,  
 Could only be here now  
 To see and hear this ! ”

But then something happened  
 Which checked of a sudden  
 The speech of the Barin :  
 A peasant who couldn't  
 Control his amusement 290  
 Gave vent to his laughter.

The Barin starts wildly,  
 He clutches the table,  
 He fixes his face  
 In the sinner's direction ;  
 The right eye is fierce,  
 Like a lynx he is watching  
 To dart on his prey,  
 And the left eye is whirling.  
 “ Go, find him ! ” he hisses, 300  
 “ Go, fetch him ! the scoundrel ! ”

The Elder dives straight  
 In the midst of the people ;  
 He asks himself wildly,  
 “ Now, what's to be done ? ”  
 He makes for the edge  
 Of the crowd, where are sitting  
 The journeying strangers ;  
 His voice is like honey :  
 “ Come one of you forward ; 310  
 You see, you are strangers,  
 He wouldn't touch *you*.”

But they are not anxious  
 To face the Pomyéshchick,

Although they would gladly  
Have helped the poor peasants.  
He's mad, the old Barin,  
So what's to prevent him  
From beating them too ?

" Well, you go, Román," 320  
Say the two brothers Góobin,  
" *You* love the Pomyéshchicks."

" I'd rather you went, though ! "  
And each is quite willing  
To offer the other.  
Then Klím loses patience ;  
" Now, Vlásuchka, help us !  
Do something to save us !  
I'm sick of the thing ! "

" Yes ! Nicely you lied there ! " 330

" Oho ! " says Klím sharply,  
" What lies did I tell ?  
And shan't we be choked  
In the grip of the Barins  
Until our last day  
When we lie in our coffins ?  
When we get to Hell, too,  
Won't they be there waiting  
To set us to work ? "

" What kind of a job 340  
Would they find for us there, Klím ? "

" To stir up the fire  
While they boil in the pots ! "  
The others laugh loudly.

160      THE LAST POMYÉSHCHICK

The sons of the Barin  
 Come hurrying to them ;  
 “ How foolish you are, Klím !  
 Our father has sent us,  
 He’s terribly angry  
 That you are so long,  
 And don’t bring the offender.” 350

“ We can’t bring him, Barin ;  
 A stranger he is,  
 From St. Petersburg province.  
 A very rich peasant ;  
 The devil has sent him  
 To us, for our sins !  
 He can’t understand us,  
 And things here amuse him ;  
 He couldn’t help laughing.” 360

“ Well, let him alone, then.  
 Cast lots for a culprit,  
 We’ll pay him. Look here ! ”  
 He offers five roubles.  
 Oh, no. It won’t tempt them.

“ Well, run to the Barin,  
 And say that the fellow  
 Has hidden himself ”

“ But what when to-morrow comes ?  
 Have you forgotten 370  
 Petrov, how we punished  
 The innocent peasant ? ”

“ Then what’s to be done ? ”



“ Give me the five roubles !  
 You trust me, I'll save you ! ”  
 Exclaims the sharp woman,  
 The Elder's sly gossip.  
 She runs from the peasants  
 Lamenting and groaning,  
 And flings herself straight 380  
 At the feet of the Barin :

“ O red little sun !  
 O my Father, don't kill me !  
 I have but one child,  
 Oh, have pity upon him !  
 My poor boy is daft,  
 Without wits the Lord made him,  
 And sent him so into  
 The world. He is crazy.  
 Why, straight from the bath 390  
 He at once begins scratching ;  
 His drink he will try  
 To pour into his laputs  
 Instead of the jug.  
 And of work he knows nothing ;  
 He laughs, and that's all  
 He can do—so God made him !  
 Our poor little home,  
 'Tis small comfort, he brings it ;  
 Our hut is in ruins, 400  
 Not seldom it happens  
 We've nothing to eat,  
 And that sets him laughing—  
 The poor crazy loon !  
 You may give him a farthing,  
 A crack on the skull,  
 And at one and the other

He'll laugh—so God made him !

And what can one say ?

From a fool even sorrow

410

Cornes pouring in laughter."

The knowing young woman !

She lies at the feet

Of the Barin, and trembles,

She squeals like a silly

Young girl when you pinch her,

She kisses his feet.

“ Well . . . go. God be with you ! ”

The Barin says 'kindly,

"I need not be angry

420

At idiot laughter,

"I'll laugh at him too!"

“How good you are, Father,”

The black-eyed young lady

Says sweetly, and strokes

The white head of the Barin.

## The black-moustached footguards

**At this put their word in :**

“A fool cannot follow

The words of his masters,

430

**Especially those**

Like the words of our father,

**So noble and clever."**

And Klím—shameless rascal !—  
Is wiping his eyes

Is wiping his eyes

On the end of his coat-tails,

Is sniffing and whining ;

**"Our Fathers! Our Fathers!"**

The sons of our Father !  
They know how to punish, 440  
But better they know  
How to pardon and pity ! ”

The old man is cheerful  
Again, and is asking  
For light frothing wine,  
And the corks begin popping  
And shoot in the air  
To fall down on the women,  
Who fly from them, shrieking.  
The Barin is laughing, 450  
The ladies then laugh,  
And at them laugh their husbands,  
And next the old servant,  
Ipát, begins laughing,  
The wet-nurse, the dry-nurse,  
And then the whole party  
Laugh loudly together ;  
The feast will be merry !  
His daughters-in-law  
At the old Prince's order 460  
Are pouring out vodka  
To give to the peasants,  
Hand cakes to the youths,  
To the girls some sweet syrup ;  
The women drink also  
A small glass of vodka.  
The old Prince is drinking  
And toasting the peasants ;  
And slyly he pinches  
The beautiful ladies. 470  
“ That's right ! That will do him  
More good than his physic,”

Says Vlásuchka, watching.  
 " He drinks by the glassful,  
 Since long he's lost measure  
 In revel, or wrath. . . ."

The music comes floating  
 To them from the Volga,  
 The girls now already  
 Are dancing and singing, 480  
 The old Prince is watching them,  
 Snapping his fingers.

He wants to be nearer  
 The girls, and he rises.  
 His legs will not bear him,  
 His two sons support him ;  
 And standing between them  
 He chuckles and whistles,  
 And stamps with his feet  
 To the time of the music ; 490  
 The left eye begins  
 On its own account working,  
 It turns like a wheel.

" But why aren't you dancing ? "  
 He says to his sons,  
 And the two pretty ladies.  
 " Dance ! Dance ! " They can't help them-  
 selves,  
 There they are dancing !  
 He laughs at them gaily,  
 He wishes to show them 500  
 How things went in *his* time ;  
 He's shaking and swaying  
 Like one on the deck  
 Of a ship in rough weather.

"Sing, Lúiba!" he orders.

The golden-haired lady

Does not want to sing,

But the old man will have it.

The lady is singing

A song low and tender,

510

It sounds like the breeze

On a soft summer evening

In velvety grasses

Astray, like spring raindrops

That kiss the young leaves,

And it soothes the Pomyéshchick.

The feeble old man:

He is falling asleep now. . . .

And gently they carry him

Down to the water,

520

And into the boat,

And he lies there, still sleeping.

Above him stands, holding

A big green umbrella,

The faithful old servant,

His other hand guarding

The sleeping Pomyéshchick

From gnats and mosquitoes.

The oarsmen are silent,

The faint-sounding music

530

Can hardly be heard

As the boat moving gently

Glides on through the water. . . .

The peasants stand watching:

The bright yellow hair

Of the beautiful lady

Streams out in the breeze

Like a long golden banner. . .

" I managed him finely, '  
 The noble Pomyéshchick, " 540  
 Said Klím to the peasants.  
 " Be God with you, Barin !  
 Go bragging and scolding,  
 Don't think for a moment  
 That we are now free  
 And your servants no longer,  
 But die as you lived,  
 The almighty Pomyéshchick,  
 To sound of our music,  
 To songs of your slaves ; 550  
 But only die quickly,  
 And leave the poor peasants  
 In peace. And now, brothers,  
 Come, praise me and thank me !  
 I've gladdened the commune.  
 I shook in my shoes there  
 Before the Pomyéshchick,  
 For fear I should trip  
 Or my tongue should betray me ;  
 And worse—I could hardly 560  
 Speak plain for my laughter !  
 That eye ! How it spins !  
 And you look at it, thinking :  
 ' But whither, my friend,  
 Do you hurry so quickly ?  
 On some hasty errand  
 Of yours, or another's ?  
 Perhaps with a pass  
 From the Tsar—Little Father,  
 You carry a message , 570  
 From him.' I was standing  
 And bursting with laughter !  
 Well, I am a drunken

And frivolous peasant,  
The rats in my corn-loft  
Are starving from hunger,  
My hut is quite bare,  
Yet I call God to witness  
That I would not take  
Such an office upon me 580  
For ten hundred roubles  
Unless I were certain  
That he was the last,  
That I bore with his bluster  
To serve my own ends,  
Of my own will and pleasure."

Old Vlásuchka sadly  
And thoughtfully answers,  
"How long, though, how long, though,  
Have we—not we only 590  
But all Russian peasants—  
Endured the Pomyéshchicks?  
And not for our pleasure,  
For money or fun,  
Not for two or three months,  
But for life. What has changed, though?  
Of what are we bragging?  
For still we are peasants."

The peasants, half-tipsy,  
Congratulate Klímka. 600  
"Hurrah! Let us toss him!"  
And now they are placing  
Old Widow Teréntevna  
Next to her bridegroom,  
The little child Jóckoff,  
Saluting them gaily.

They're eating and drinking  
     What's left on the table.  
 Then romping and jesting  
     They stay till the evening, 610  
 And only at nightfall  
     Return to the village.  
 And here they are met  
     By some sobering tidings :  
 The old Prince is dead.  
     From the boat he was taken,  
 They thought him asleep,  
     But they found he was lifeless.  
 The second stroke—while  
     He was sleeping—had fallen ! 620

The peasants are sobered,  
     They look at each other,  
 And silently cross themselves.  
     Then they breathe deeply ;  
 And never before  
     Did the poor squalid village  
 Called " Ignorant-Duffers,"  
     Of Volost " Old-Dustmen,"  
 Draw such an intense  
     And unanimous breath. . . . 630  
 Their pleasure, however,  
     Was not very lasting,  
 Because with the death  
     Of the ancient Pomyéshchick,  
 The sweet-sounding words  
     Of his heirs and their bounties  
 Ceased also. Not even  
     A pick-me-up after  
 The yesterday's feast  
     Did they offer the peasants. 640



And as to the hayfields—  
Till now is the law-suit  
Proceeding between them,  
The heirs and the peasar ts.  
Old Vlásuchka was  
By the peasants appointed  
To plead in their name,  
And he lives now in Moscow.  
He went to St. Petersburg too,  
But I don't think  
That much can be done  
For the cause of the peasants.

650



## PART III

### THE PEASANT WOMAN

#### PROLOGUE

“ Not only to men  
Must we go with our question,  
We'll ask of the women,”

The peasants decided.

They asked in the village  
“ Split-up,” but the people  
Replied to them shortly,  
“ Not here will you find one.

But go to the village  
‘ Stripped-Naked ’—a woman  
Lives there who is happy.

10

She's hardly a woman,  
She's more like a cow,  
For a woman so healthy,  
So smooth and so clever,  
Could hardly be found.

You must seek in the village  
Matróna Korchágin—

The people there call her  
‘ The Governor's Lady.’ ”

20

The peasants considered  
And went. . . .

Now already  
The corn-stalks are rising  
Like tall graceful columns,  
With gilded heads nodding,  
And whispering softly  
In gentle low voices.  
Oh, beautiful summer !  
No time is so gorgeous, 30  
So regal, so rich.

You full yellow cornfields,  
To look at you now  
One would never imagine  
How sorely God's people  
Had toiled to array you  
Before you arose,  
In the sight of the peasant,  
And stood before him,  
Like a glorious army 40  
In front of a Tsar !  
'Tis not by warm dew-drops  
That you have been moistened,  
The sweat of the peasant  
Has fallen upon you.

The peasants are gladdened  
At sight of the oats  
And the rye and the barley,  
But not by the wheat,  
For it feeds but the chosen : 50  
“ We love you not, wheat !  
But the rye and the barley  
We love—they are kind,  
They feed all men alike.”

The flax, too, is growing  
So sweetly and bravely :  
“ A. ! you little mite !  
You are caught and entangled ! ’  
A poor little lark  
In the flax has been captured ; 60  
It struggles for freedom  
Pakhóm picks it up,  
He kisses it tenderly :  
“ Fly, little birdie ! ” . . .  
The lark flies away  
To the blue heights of Heaven ;  
The kind-hearted peasants  
Gaze lovingly upwards  
To see it rejoice  
In the freedom above. . . . 70  
The peas have come on, too ;  
Like locusts, the peasants  
Attack them and eat them.  
They’re like a plump maiden—  
The peas—for whoever  
Goes by must needs pinch them.  
Now peas are being carried  
In old hands, in young hands,  
They’re spreading abroad  
Over seventy high-roads, 80  
The vegetables—how  
They’re flourishing also !  
Each toddler is clasping  
A radish or carrot,  
And many are cracking  
The seeds of the sunflower.  
The beetroots are dotted  
Like little red slippers  
All over the earth.

Our peasants 'are walking, 90  
 Now faster—now slower.

At last they have reached it—  
 The village 'Stripped-Naked,'

It's not much to look at :  
 Each hut is propped up

Like a beggar on crutches ;  
 The thatch from the roofs

Has made food for the cattle ;  
 The huts are like feeble

Old skeletons standing, 100  
 Like desolate rooks' nests

When young birds forsake them,  
 When wild Autumn winds

Have dismantled the birch-trees.  
 The people are all

In the fields ; they are working.  
 Behind the poor village

A manor is standing ;  
 It's built on the slope

Of a hill, and the peasants 110  
 Are making towards it

To look at it close.

The house is gigantic,  
 The courtyard is huge,  
 There's a pond in it too ;

A watch-tower arises  
 From over the house,  
 With a gallery round it,  
 A flagstaff upon it.

They meet with a lackey 120  
 Near one of the gates :  
 He seems to be wearing

A strange kind o' mantle ;  
 " Well, what are you up to ? "  
 He says to the friends,  
 " The Pomyéshchick's abroad now,  
 The manager's dying "  
 He shows them his back,  
 And they all begin laughing :  
 A tiger is clutching 130  
 The edge of his shoulders !  
 " Hen ! here's a fine joke ! "  
 They are hotly discussing  
 What kind of a mantle  
 The lackey is wearing,  
 Till clever Pakhóm  
 Has got hold of the riddle.  
 " The cunning old rascal,  
 He's stolen a carpet,  
 And cut in the middle 140  
 A hole for his head ! '

Like weak, straddling beetles  
 Shut up to be frozen  
 In cold empty huts  
 By the pitiless peasants.  
 The servants are crawling  
 All over the courtyard.  
 Their master long since  
 Has forgotten about them,  
 And left them to live 150  
 As they can. They are hungry,  
 All old and decrepit,  
 And dressed in all manners,  
 They look like a crowd  
 In a gipsy encampment.  
 And some are now dragging

A net through the pond :

“ God come to your help !

Have you caught something, brothers ? ”

“ One carp—nothing more ; 160

There used once to be many ,

But now we have come

To the end of the feast ! ”

“ Do try to get five ! ”

Says a pale, pregnant woman,

Who's fervently blowing

A fire near the pond.

“ And what are those pretty

Carved poles you are burning ?

They're balcony railings, 170

I think, are they not ? ”

“ Yes, balcony railings.”

“ See here. They're like tinder ;  
Don't blow on them, Mother !

I bet they'll burn faster

Than you find the victuals

To cook in the pot ! ”

“ I'm waiting and waiting,  
And Mityenka sicken.

Because of the musty 180

Old bread that I give him.

But what can I do ?

This life—it is bitter ! ”

She fondles the head

Of a half-naked baby

Who sits by her side



In a little brass basin,  
A button-nosed mite.

“The boy will take cold there,  
The basin will chill him,” 190  
Says Prov ; and he wishes  
To lift the child up,  
But it screams at him, angry  
“No, no ! Don’t you touch him,”  
The mother says quickly, . .  
“Why, can you not see  
That’s his carriage he’s driving ?  
Drive on, little carriage !  
Gee-up, little horses !  
You see how he drives ! ” 200

The peasants each moment  
Observe some new marvel ;  
And soon they have noticed  
A strange kind of labour  
Proceeding around them :  
One man, it appears,  
To the door has got fastened ;  
He’s toiling away  
To unscrew the brass handles,  
His hands are so weak 210  
He can scarcely control them.  
Another is hugging  
Some tiles : “ Scè, Yegórshka,  
I’ve dug quite a heap out ! ”  
Some children are shaking  
An apple-tree yonder :  
“ You see, little Uncles,  
There aren’t many left,  
Though the tree was quite heavy.”

“ But why do you want them ? 220  
They’re quite hard and green.”

“ We’re thankful to get them ! ”

The peasants examine  
The park for a long time ;  
Such wonders are seen here,  
Such cunning inventions :  
In one place a mountain  
Is raised ; in another  
A ravine yawns deep !  
A lake has been made too ; 230

Perhaps at one time  
There were swans on the water ?

The summer-house has some  
Inscriptions upon it,  
Demyán begins spelling  
Them out very slowly.

A grey-naired domestic  
Is watching the peasants ;  
He sees they have very  
Inquisitive natures, 240

And presently slowly  
Goes hobbling towards them,  
And holding a book.  
He says, “ Will you buy it ? ”

Demyán is a peasant  
Acquainted with letters,  
He tries for some time  
But he can’t read a word.

“ Just sit down yourself  
On that seat near the linden, 250  
And read the book leisurely  
Like a Pomyéshchick ! ”

“ You think you are clever,”  
 The grey-headed servant  
 Retorts with resentment,  
 “ Yet books which are learned  
 Are wasted upon you.  
 You read but the labels  
 On public-house windows,  
 And that which is written  
 On every odd corner :  
 ‘ Most strictly forbidden.’ ”

265

The pathways are filthy,  
 The graceful stone ladies  
 Bereft of their noses.  
 “ The fruit and the berries,  
 The geese and the swans  
 Which were once on the water,  
 The thieving old rascals  
 Have stuffed in their maws.  
 Like church without pastor,  
 Like fields without peasants,  
 Are all these fine gardens  
 Without a Pomyéshchick,”  
 The peasants remark.  
 For long the Pomyéshchick  
 Has gathered his treasures,  
 When all of a sudden. . . :  
 (The six peasants laugh,  
 But the seventh is silent,  
 He hangs down his head.)

270

280

A song bursts upon them !  
 A voice is resounding  
 Like blasts of a trumpet.  
 The heads of the peasants  
 Are eagerly lifted,

They gaze at the tower.  
 On the balcony round it  
 A man is now standing ;  
 He wears a pope's cassock ; 290  
 He sings . . . on the balmy  
 Soft air of the evening,  
 The bass, like a huge  
 Silver bell, is vibrating,  
 And throbbing it enters  
 The hearts of the peasants.  
 The words are not Russian,  
 But some foreign language,  
 But, like Russian songs,  
 It is full of great sorrow, 300  
 Of passionate grief,  
 Unending, unfathomed ,  
 It wails and laments,  
 It is bitterly sobbing. . . .

" Pray tell us, good woman,  
 What man is that singing ? "  
 Román asks the woman  
 Now feeding her baby  
 With steaming *ukhá*.<sup>1</sup>

" A singer, my brothers, 310  
 A born Little Russian,  
 The Barin once brought him  
 Away from his home,  
 With a promise to send him  
 To Italy later.  
 But long the Pomyéshchick  
 Has been in strange parts  
 And forgotten his promise ;  
 And now the poor fellow

<sup>1</sup> *Ukhá*—fish soup.

## PROLOGUE

181

Would be but too glad 320

To get back to his village.

There's nothing to do here,

He hasn't a farthing,

There's nothing before him

And nothing behind him

Excepting his voice.

You have not really heard it ;

You will if you stay here

Till sunrise to-morrow .

Some three versts away 330

There is living a deacon,

And he has a voice too.

They greet one another :

Each morning at sunrise

Will our little singer

Climb up to the watch-tower,

And call to the other,

Good-morrow to Father

Ipát, and how fares he ? '

(The windows all shake 340

At the sound.)

From the distance

The deacon will answer,

Good-morrow, good-morrow,

To our little sweet-throat !

I go to drink vodka,

I'm going . . . I'm going . . .

The voice on the air

Will hang quivering around us

For more than an hour, 350

Like the neigh of a stallion."

The cattle are now

Coming home, and the evening

Is filled with the fragrance  
Of milk ; and the woman,  
The mother of Mítyenka,  
Sighs ; she is thinking,  
“ If only one cow  
Would turn into the courtyard ! ”  
But hark ! In the distance 360  
Some voices in chorus !  
“ Good-bye, you poor mourners,  
May God send you comfort !  
The people are coming,  
We’re going to meet them.”

The peasants are filled  
With relief ; because after  
The whining old servants  
The people who meet them  
Returning from work 370  
In the fields seem such healthy  
And beautiful people.  
The men and the women  
And pretty young girls  
Are all singing together.

“ Good health to you ! Which is  
Among you the woman  
Matróna Korchágin ? ”  
The peasant demand.

“ And what do you want 380  
With Matróna Korchágin ? ”

The woman Matróna  
Is tall, finely moulded,  
Majestic in bearing,  
And strikingly handsome.  
Of thirty-eight years

She appears, and her black hair  
Is mingled with grey.

Her complexion is swarthy,  
Her eyes large and dark 390

And severe, with rich lashes.

A white shirt, and short

Sarafán<sup>1</sup> she is wearing,

She walks with a hay-fork

Slung over her shoulder.

“ Well, what do you want

With Matróna Korchágin ? ”

The peasants are silent ;

They wait till the others

Have gone in advance, 400

And then, bowing, they answer :

“ We come from afar,

And a trouble torments us,

A trouble so great

That for it we’ve forsaken

Our homes and our work, ,

And our appetites fail.

We’re orthodox peasants,

From District ‘ Most Wretched,’

From ‘ Destitute Parish,’ 410

From neighbouring hamlets,—

‘ Patched,’ ‘ Barefoot,’ and ‘ Shabby,’

‘ Bleak,’ ‘ Burnt-Out,’ and ‘ Hungry,’

And ‘ Harvestless,’ too.

We met in the roadway

And argued about

Who is happy in Russia.

Luká said, ‘ The pope,’

<sup>1</sup> A national loose sleeveless dress worn with a separate shirt or blouse.

And Demyán, 'The Pomyéshchick,'  
 And Prov said, 'The Tsar,' 420

And Román, 'The official.'  
 'The round-bellied merchant,'  
 Said both brothers Goóbin,  
 Mitródor and Ívan.

Pakhóm said, 'His Highness,  
 The Tsar's Chief Adviser.'

Like bulls are the peasants :

Once folly is in them

You cannot dislodge it

Although you should beat them 430

With stout wooden cudgels,

They stick to their folly

And nothing will move them.

We argued and quarrelled,

While quarrelling fought,

And while fighting decided

That never again

Would we turn our steps homewards

To kiss wives and children,

To see the old people, 440

Until we have found

The reply to our question,

Of who can in Russia

Be happy and free ?

We've questioned the pope,

We've asked the Pomyéshchick,

And now we ask you.

We'll see: the official,

The Minister, merchant,

We even will go 450

To the Tsar—Little Father,

Though whether he'll see us

We cannot be sure.



But rumour has told us  
That *you're* free and happy.  
Then say, in God's name,  
If the rumour be true."

Matróna Korchágin  
Does not seem astonished,  
But only a sad look  
Creeps into her eyes,  
And her face becomes thoughtful.

"Your errand is surely  
A foolish one, brothers,"  
She says to the peasants,  
"For this is the season  
Of work, and no peasant  
For chatter has time."

"Till now on our journey  
Throughout half the Empire  
We've met no denial," 470  
The peasants protest.

"But look for yourselves, now,  
The corn-ears are bursting.  
We've not enough hands."

"And we? What are we for?  
Just give us some sickles,  
And see if we don't  
Get some work done to-morrow!"  
The peasants reply. 480

Matróna sees clearly  
Enough that this offer  
Must not be rejected;



## THE WEDDING

187

On the magic white napkin,  
And dwindle away.  
The two brothers Goóbin  
Are chuckling together,  
For they have just pilfered 520  
A very big horse-radish  
Out of the garden—  
It's really a monster !

The skies are dark blue now,  
The bright stars are twinkling,  
The moon has arisen  
And sails high above them ;  
The woman Matróna  
Comes out of the cottage  
To tell them her tale. 530

## CHAPTER I

### THE WEDDING

“ My girlhood was happy,  
For we were a thrifty  
And diligent household ;  
And I, the young maiden,  
With Father and Mother  
Knew nothing but joy.  
My father got up  
And went out before sunrise,  
He woke me with kisses  
And tender caresses ; 10  
My brother, while dressing,  
Would sing little verses :

Get up, little Sister,  
Get up, little Sister,  
In no little beds now  
Are people delaying,  
In all little churches  
The peasants are praying,  
Get up, now, get up,  
It is time, little Sister. 20  
The shepherd has gone  
To the field with the sheep,  
And no little maidens  
Are lying asleep,  
They've gone to pick raspberries,  
Merrily singing  
The sound of the axe  
In the forest is ringing.'

"And then my dear mother,  
When she had done scouring 30  
The pots and the pans,  
When the hut was put tidy,  
The bread in the oven,  
Would steal to my bedside,  
And cover me softly  
And whisper to me :

"Sleep on, little dove,  
Gather strength—you will need it—  
You will not stay always  
With Father and Mother, 40  
And when you will leave them  
To live among strangers  
Not long will you sleep.  
You'll slave till past midnight,  
And rise before daybreak ;

You'll always be weary.  
They'll give you a basket  
And throw at the bottom  
A crust. You will chew it,  
My poor little dove, 50  
And start working again. . .

“But, brothers, I did not  
Spend much time in sleeping ;  
And when I was five  
On the day of St. Simon,  
I mounted a horse  
With the help of my father,  
And then was no longer  
A child. And at six years  
I carried my father 60  
His breakfast already,  
And tended the ducks,  
And at night brought the cow home,  
And next—took my rake,  
And was off to the hayfields !  
And so by degrees  
I became a great worker,  
And yet best of all  
I loved singing and dancing ;  
The whole day I worked 70  
In the fields, and at nightfall  
Returned to the cottage  
All covered with grime  
But what's the hot bath for ?  
And thanks to the bath  
And boughs of the birch-tree,  
And icy spring water,  
Again I was clean  
And refreshed, and was ready

To take out my spinning-wheel,      80  
 And with companions  
 To sing half the night.

“ I never ran after  
 The youths, and the forward  
 I checked very sharply.  
 To those who were gentle  
 And shy, I would whisper :  
 ‘ My cheeks will grow hot,  
 And sharp eyes has my mother ;  
 Be wise, now, and leave me      90  
 Alone ’—and they left me.

“ No matter how clever  
 I was to avoid them,  
 The one came at last  
 I was destined to wed ;  
 And he—to my bitter  
 Regret—was a stranger :  
 Young Phílíp Korchágin,  
 A boulder of ovens.  
 He came from St. Petersburg.      100  
 Oh, how my mother  
 Did weep : ‘ Like a fish  
 In the ocean, my daughter,  
 You’ll plunge and be lost ;  
 Like a nightingale, straying  
 Away from its nest,  
 We shall lose you, my daughter !  
 The walls of the stranger  
 Are not built of sugar,  
 Are not spread with honey,      110  
 Their dwellings are chilly  
 And garnished with hunger ;

The cold winds will nip you,  
The black rooks will scold you,  
The savage dogs bite you,  
The strangers despise you.'

"But Father sat talking  
And drinking till late  
With the 'swat.'<sup>1</sup> I was frightened,  
I slept not all night. . . . 110

"Oh, youth, pray you, tell me,  
Now what can you find  
In the maiden to please you ?  
And where have you seen her ?  
Perhaps in the sledges  
With merry young friends  
Flying down from the mountain ?  
Then you were mistaken,  
O son of your father,  
It was but the frost 130  
And the speed and the laughter  
That brought the bright tints  
To the cheeks of the maiden.  
Perhaps at some feast  
In the home of a neighbour  
You saw her rejoicing  
And clad in bright colours ?  
But then she was plump  
From her rest in the winter ;  
Her rosy face bloomed 140  
Like the scarlet-hued poppy ;  
But wait !—have you been  
To the hut of her father  
And seen her at work  
Beating flax in the barr. ?

<sup>1</sup> The marriage agent.

Ah, what shall I do ?

I will take brother falcon  
And send him to town :

‘ Fly to town, brother falcon,  
And bring me some cloth

150

And six colours of worsted,  
And tassels of blue.

I will make a fine curtain,  
Embroider each corner

With Tsar and Tsaritsa,  
With Moscow and Kiev,

And Constantinople,  
And set the great sun

Shining bright in the middle,  
And this I will hang

160

In the front of my window :  
Perhaps you will see it,

And, struck by its beauty,  
Will stand and admire it,

And will not remember  
To seek for the maiden.’ . . .

“ And so till the morning  
I lay with such thoughts.

‘ Now, leave me, young fellow,’  
I said to the youth

170

When he came in the evening ;

‘ I will not be foolish  
Enough to abandon

My freedom in order  
To enter your service.

God sees me—I will not  
Depart from my home ! ’

“ ‘ Do come,’ said young Philip,  
‘ So far have I travelled



To fetch you. Don't fear me— 180  
 I will not ill-treat you.'  
 I begged him to leave me,  
 I wept and lamented ;  
 But nevertheless  
 I was still a young maiden :  
 I did not forget  
 Sidelong glances to cast  
 At the youth who thus wooed me.  
 And Philip was handsome,  
 Was rosy and lusty, 190  
 Was strong and broad-shouldered  
 With fair curling hair,  
 With a voice low and tender.  
 Ah, well . . . I was won. . . .

" ' Come here, pretty fellow,  
 And stand up against me,  
 Look deep in my eyes—  
 They are clear eyes and truthful ;  
 Look well at my rosy  
 Young face, and bethink you : 200  
 Will you not regret it,  
 Won't my heart be broken,  
 And shall I not weep  
 Day and night if I trust you  
 And go with you, leaving  
 My parents for ever ? '

" ' Don't fear, little pigeon,  
 We shall not regret it,'  
 Said Philip, but still  
 I was timid and doubtful. 210  
 ' Do go,' murmured I, and he,  
 ' When you come with me.'

Of course I was fairer  
 And sweeter and dearer  
 Than any that lived,  
 And his arms were about me. .  
 Then all of a sudden  
 I made a sharp effort  
 To wrench myself free. 219  
 'How now? What's the matter?  
 You're strong, little pigeon!'  
 Said Philip astonished,  
 But still held me tight.  
 'Ah, Philip, if you had  
 Not held me so firmly  
 You would not have won me;  
 I did it to try you,  
 To measure your strength;  
 You were strong, and it pleased me.'  
 We must have been happy 230  
 In those fleeting moments  
 When softly we whispered  
 And argued together;  
 I think that we never  
 Were happy again. . . .  
 "How well I remember. . .  
 The night was like this night,  
 Was starlit and silent . . .  
 Was dreamy and tender  
 Like this. . . .' 240  
 And the woman,  
 Matróna, sighed deeply,  
 And softly began—  
 Leaning back on the haystack—  
 To sing to herself  
 With her thoughts in the past:

“ ‘ Tell me, young merchant, pray,  
Why do you love me so—  
Poor peasant’s daughter ?  
I am not clad in gold, 250  
I am not hung with pearls,  
Not decked with silver.’ ”

“ ‘ Silver your chastity,  
Golden your beauty shines,  
O my beloved,  
White pearls are falling now  
Out of your weeping eyes,  
Falling like tear-drops.’ ”

“ My father gave orders  
To bring forth the wine-cups, 260  
To set them all out  
On the solid oak table.  
My dear mother blessed me :  
‘ Go, serve them, my daughter,  
Bow low to the strangers.’ ”

I bowed for the first time,  
My knees shook and trembled ;  
I bowed for the second—  
My face had turned white ;  
And then for the third time 270  
I bowed, and forever  
The freedom of girlhood  
Rolled down from my head. . . .”

“ Ah, that means a wedding, ’  
Cry both brothers Goówin,  
“ Let’s drink to the health  
Of the happy young pair ! ”

“ Well said ! We’ll begin  
With the bride,” say the others.

“ Will you drink some vočka, 280  
Matróna Korchágin ? ”

“ An old woman, brothers,  
And not drink some vodka ? ”

## CHAPTER II

### A SONG

Stand before your judge—  
And your legs will quake !  
Stand before the priest  
On your wedding-day,—  
How your head will ache !  
How your head will ache !  
You will call to mind  
Songs of long ago,       :  
Songs of gloom and woe :  
Telling how the guests 10  
Crowd into the yard,  
Run to see the bride  
Whom the husband brings  
Homeward at his side.  
How his parents both  
Fling themselves on her ;  
How his brother's soon  
Call her “ wasteful one ” ;  
How his sisters next  
Call her “ giddy one ” ; 20  
How his father growls,  
“ Greedy little bear ! ”  
How his mother snarls,  
“ Cannibal ! ” at her.

She is "slovenly"  
 And "disorderly,"  
 She's a "wicked one" !

"All that's in the song  
 Happened now to me.  
 Do you know the song ?                    30  
 Have you heard it sung ? "

"Yes, we know it well ;  
 Gossip, you begin,  
 We will all join in."

*Matróna*

So sleepy, so weary  
 I am, and my heavy head  
 Clings to the pillow.  
 But out in the passage  
 My Father-in-law  
 Begins stamping and swearing.                    40

*Peasants in Chorus*

Stamping and swearing !  
 Stamping and swearing !  
 He won't let the poor woman  
 Rest for a moment.  
 Up, up, up, lazy-head !  
 Up, up, up, lie-~~a~~bed !  
     Lazy-head !  
     Lie-~~a~~bed !  
     Slut !

*Matróna*

So sleepy, so weary    50  
 I am, and my heavy head  
 Clings to the pillow ;

But out in the passage  
 My Mother-in-law  
 Begins scolding and nagging.

*Peasants in Chorus*

Scolding and nagging !  
 Scolding and nagging !  
 She won't let the poor woman  
 Rest for a moment.  
 Up, up, up, lazy-head ! 60  
 Up, up, up, lie-abed !  
 Lazy-head !  
 Lie-abed !  
 Slut !

“ A quarrelsome household  
 It was—that of Philip's  
 To which I belonged now ;  
 And I from my girlhood  
 Stepped straight into Hell.  
 My husband departed 70  
 To work in the city,  
 And leaving, advised me  
 To work and be silent,  
 To yield and be patient :  
 ‘ Don't splash the red iron  
 With cold water—it hisses ! ’  
 With father and mother  
 And sisters-in-law he  
 Now left me alone ;  
 Not a soul was among them 80  
 To love or to shield me,  
 But many to scold.  
 One sister-in-law—  
 It was Martha, the eldest,—

Soon set me to work  
Like a slave for her pleasure.  
And Father-in-law too  
One had to look after,  
Or else all his clothes  
To redeem from the tavern. 90  
In all that one did  
There was need to be careful,  
Or Mother-in-law's  
Superstitions were troubled  
(One never could please her).  
Well, some superstitions  
Of course may be right ;  
But they're most of them evil.  
And one day it happened  
That Mother-in-law 100  
Murmured low to her husband  
That corn which is stolen  
Grows faster and better.  
So Father-in-law  
Stole away after midnight.  
It chanced he was caught,  
And at daybreak next morning  
Brought back and flung down  
Like a log in the stable.

“ But I acted always 110  
As Philip had told me :  
I worked, with the anger  
Hid deep in my bosom,  
And never a murmur  
Allowed to escape me.  
And then with the winter  
Came Philip, and brought me  
A pretty silk scarf ;

And one feast-day he took me  
To drive in the sledges ; 120  
And quickly my sorrows  
Were lost and forgotten :  
I sang as in old days  
At home, with my father.  
For I and my husband  
Were both of an age,  
And were happy together  
When only they left us  
Alone, but remember  
A husband like Philip 130  
Not often is found."

" Do you mean to say  
That he never once beat you ? "

Matróna was plainly  
Confused by the question ;  
" Once, only, he beat me,"  
She said, very low.

" And why ? " asked the peasants

" Well, you know yourselves, friends,  
How quarrels arise 140  
In the homes of the peasants.  
A young married sister  
Of Philip's one day  
Came to visit her parents.  
She found she had holes  
In her boots, and it vexed her.  
Then Philip said, ' Wife,  
Fetch some boots for my sister.'  
And I did not answer  
At once ; I was lifting 150



A large wooden tub, •  
So, of course, couldn't speak.  
But Philip was angry  
With me, and he waited  
Until I had hoisted  
The tub to the oven,  
Then struck me a blow  
With his fist, on my temple.

“ ‘ We’re glad that you came,  
But you see that you’d better ’ 160  
Keep out of the way,’  
Said the other young sister  
To her that was married.

“ Again Philip struck me !  
“ ‘ It’s long since I’ve seen you,  
My dearly-loved daughter,  
But could I have known  
How the baggage would treat you . . !’  
Whined Mother-in-law.

“ And again Philip struck me ! 170  
“ Well, that is the story.  
’Tis surely not fitting  
For wives to sit counting  
The blows of their husbands,  
But then I had promised  
To keep nothing back.”

“ Ah, well, with these women—  
The poisonous serpents !—  
A corpse would awaken  
And snatch up a horsewhip,” 180  
The peasants say, smiling.

Matróna said nothing  
 The peasants, in order  
 To keep the occasion  
 In manner befitting,  
 Are filling the glasses ;  
 And now they are singing  
 In voices of thunder  
 A rollicking chorus,  
 Of husbands' relations,  
 And wielding the knout.

190

\* \* \*  
 " Cruel hated husband,  
 Hark ! he is coming !  
 Holding the knout. . . .

*Chorus*

" Hear the lash whistle !  
 See the blood spurt !  
 Ai, leli, leli !  
 See the blood spurt !

\* \* \*  
 " Rur to his father !  
 Bowing before him—  
 ' Save me ! ' I beg him ;  
 ' Stop my fierce husband—  
 Venomous serpent ! '  
 Father-in-law says,  
 ' Beat her more soundly !  
 Draw the blood freely ! '

200

*Chorus*

" Hear the lash whistle !  
 See the blood spurt !  
 Ai, leli, leli !  
 See the blood spurt !

210

\* \* \*

‘ Quick—to his mother !  
 Bowing before her—  
 ‘ Save me ! ’ I beg her ;  
 ‘ Stop my cruel husband !  
 Venomous serpent ! ’  
 Mother-in-law says,  
 ‘ Beat her more soundly,  
 Draw the blood freely ! ’

*Chorus*

“ Hear the lash whistle !  
 See the blood spurt !  
 Aí, leí, leí !  
 See the blood spurt ! ”

220

“ On Lady-day Philip  
 Went back to the city ;  
 A little while later  
 Our baby was born.  
 Like a bright-coloured picture  
 Was he—little Djóma ;  
 The sunbeams had given  
 Their radiance to him,  
 The pure snow its whiteness ;  
 The poppies had painted  
 His lips ; by the sable  
 His brow had been pencilled ;  
 The falcon had fashioned  
 His eyes, and had lent them  
 Their wonderful brightness.  
 At sight of his first  
 Angel smile, all the anger  
 And bitterness nursed  
 In my bosom was melted ;  
 It vanished away

230

240

Like the snow on the meadows  
 At sight of the smiling  
 Spring sun. And not longer  
 I worried and fretted ;  
 I worked, and in silence  
 I let them upbraid.  
 But soon after that  
 A misfortune befell me : 250  
 The manager by  
 The Pomyéshchick appointed,  
 Called Sitnikov, hotly  
 Began to pursue me.  
 ‘ My lovely Tsaritsa !  
 ‘ My rosy-ripe berry ! ’  
 Said he ; and I answered,  
 ‘ Be off, shameless rascal !  
 Remember, the berry  
 Is not in *your* forest ! ’ 260  
 I stayed from the field-work,  
 And hid in the cottage ;  
 He very soon found me.  
 I hid in the corn-loft,  
 But Mother-in-law  
 Dragged me out to the courtyard ;  
 ‘ Now don’t play with fire, girl ! ’  
 She said. I besought her  
 To send him away,  
 But she answered me roughly, 270  
 ‘ And do you want Philip  
 To serve as a soldier ? ’  
 I ran to Savyéli,  
 The grandfather, begging  
 His aid and advice.  
 ‘ I haven’t yet told you  
 A word of Savyéli,

The only one living  
 Of Philip's relations  
 Who pitied and loved me. 280  
 Say, friends, shall I tell you  
 About him as well ? ”

“ Yes, tell us his tale,  
 And we'll each throw a couple  
 Of sheaves in to-morrow,  
 Above what we promised.”

“ Well, well,” says Matróna,  
 “ And 'twould be a pity  
 To give old Savyéli  
 No place in the story ; 290  
 For he was a happy one,  
 Too—the old man. . . .”

## CHAPTER III.

## SAVYÉLI

“ A mane grey and bushy  
 Which covered his shoulders,  
 A huge grizzled beard  
 Which had not seen the scissors  
 For twenty odd years,  
 Made Savyéli resemble  
 A shaggy old bear,  
 Especially when he  
 Came out of the forest,  
 So broad and bent double. 10  
 The grandfather's shoulders

Were bowed very low,  
And at first I was frightened  
Whenever he entered  
The tiny low cottage :  
I thought that were he  
To stand straight of a sudden  
He'd knock a great hole  
With his head in the ceiling.  
But Grandfather could not 20  
Stand straight, and they told me  
That he was a hundred.  
He lived all alone  
In his own little cottage,  
And never permitted  
The others to enter ;  
He couldn't abide them.  
Of course they were angry  
And often abused him.  
His own son would shout at him, 30  
' Branded one ! Convict !'  
But this did not anger  
Savyéh, he only  
Would go to his cottage  
Without making answer,  
And, crossing himself,  
Begin reading the scriptures ;  
Then suddenly cry  
In a voice loud and joyful,  
' Though branded—no slave !' 40  
When too much they annoyed him,  
He sometimes would say to them :  
' Look, the swat's<sup>1</sup> coming !'  
The unmarried daughter  
Would fly to the window ;  
<sup>1</sup> The marriage agent.

Instead of the swat there  
A beggar she'd find !  
And one day he silvered  
A common brass farthing,  
And left it to lie 50  
On the floor ; and then straightway  
Did Father-in-law run  
In joy to the tavern,—  
He came back, not tipsy,  
But beaten half-dead !  
At supper that night  
We were all very silent,  
And Father-in-law had  
A cut on his eyebrow,  
But Grandfather's face 60  
Wore a smile like a rainbow !

“ Savyéli would gather  
The berries and mushrooms  
From spring till late autumn,  
And snare the wild rabbits ;  
Throughout the long winter  
He lay on the oven  
And talked to himself.  
He had favourite sayings :  
He used to lie thinking 70  
For whole hours together,  
And once in an hour  
You would hear him exclaiming :

“ ‘ Destroyed . . . and subjected ! ’  
Or, ‘ Ai, you toy heroes !  
You're fit but for battles  
With old men and women ! ’

“ ‘ Be patient . . . and perish,  
Impatient . . . and perish ! ’

“ ‘ Eh, you Russian peasant, 80  
You giant, you strong man,  
The whole of your lifetime  
You’re flogged, yet you dare not  
Take refuge in death,  
For Hell’s torments await you ! ’

“ ‘ At last the Korójns <sup>1</sup>  
Awoke, and they paid him,  
They paid him, they paid him,  
They paid the whole debt ! ’ 90  
And many such sayings  
He had,—I forget them.  
When Father-in-law grew  
Too noisy I always  
Would run to Savyéli,  
And we two, together,  
Would fasten the door.  
Then I began working,  
While Djómushka climbed  
To the grandfather’s shoulder,  
And sat there, and looked 100  
Like a bright little apple  
That hung on a hoary  
Old tree. Once I asked him :

“ ‘ And why do they call you  
A convict, Savyéli ? ’

“ ‘ I was once a convict,’  
Said he

<sup>1</sup> Inhabitants of the village Korójin



“ ‘ You, Savyéli ! ’

“ ‘ Yes I, little Grandchild,  
Yes, I have been branded. 110  
I buried a German  
Alive—Christian Vogel.’

“ ‘ You’re joking, Savyéli ! ’

“ ‘ Oh no, I’m not joking.’  
I mean it,’ he said,  
And he told me the story.

“ ‘ The peasants in old days  
Were serfs as they now are,  
But our race had, somehow,  
Not seen its Pomyéshchick ; 120  
No manager knew we,  
No pert German agent.  
And barschin we gave not,  
And taxes we paid not  
Except when it pleased us,—  
Perhaps once in three years  
Our taxes we’d pay.’

“ ‘ But why, little Grandad ? ’

“ ‘ The times were so blessed,—  
And folk had a saying 130  
That our little village  
Was sought by the devil  
For more than three years,  
But he never could find it.  
Great forests a thousand  
Years old lay about us ;

And treacherous marshes  
And bogs spread around us ;  
No horseman and few men  
On foot ever reached us. 140  
It happened that once  
By some chance, our Pomyéshchuk,  
Shaláshnikov, wanted  
To pay us a visit.  
High placed in the army  
Was he ; and he started  
With soldiers to find us.  
They soon got bewildered  
And lost in the forest,  
And had to turn back ; 150  
Why, the Zemsky policeman  
Would only come once  
In a year ! They were good times !  
In these days the Barin  
Lives under your window ;  
The roadways go spreading  
Around, like white napkins—  
The devil destroy them !  
We only were troubled  
By bears, and the bears too 160  
Were easily managed.  
Why, I was a worse foe  
By far than old Mishka,  
When armed with a dagger  
And bear-spear. I wandered  
In wild, secret woodpaths,  
And shouted, “ *My* forest ! ”  
And once, only once,  
I was frightened by something :  
I stepped on a huge 170  
Female bear that was lying

Asleep in her den  
In the heart of the forest.  
She flung herself at me,  
And straight on my bear-spear  
Was fixed. Like a fowl  
On the spit she hung twisting  
An hour before death.  
It was then that my spine snapped.  
It often was painful 180  
When I was a young man ;  
But now I am old,  
It is fixed and bent double.  
Now, do I not look like  
A hook, little Grandchild ? ’

“ ‘ But finish the story.  
You lived and were not much  
Afflicted. What further ? ’

“ ‘ At last our Pomyśhchick  
Invented a new game ; 190  
He sent us an order,  
“ Appear ! ” We appeared not.  
Instead, we lay low  
In our dens, hardly breathing.  
A terrible drought  
Had descended that summer,  
The bogs were all dry ;  
So he sent a policeman,  
Who managed to reach us,  
To gather our taxes, 200  
In honey and fish ;  
A second time came he,  
We gave him some bear-skins ;  
And when for the third time

He came, we gave nothing,—

We said we had nothing.

We put on our laputs,

We put our old caps on,

Our oldest old coats,

And we went to Korójin

210

(For there was our master now,

Stationed with soldiers).

“Your taxes!” “We have none,

We cannot pay taxes,

The corn has not grown,

And the fish have escaped us.”

“Your taxes!” “We have none.”

He waited no longer;

“Hey! Give them the first round!”

He said, and they flogged us.

220

“Our pockets were not

Very easily opened;

Shaláshnikov, though, was

A master at flogging.

Our tongues became parched,

And our brains were set whirling,

And still he continued.

He flogged not with birch-rods,

With whips or with sticks,

But with kncuts made for giants. 230

At last we could stand it

No longer; we shouted,

“Enough! Let us breathe!”

We unwound our foot-rags

And took out our money,

And brought to the Barin

A ragged old bonnet

With roubles half filled

“ ‘ The Barin grew calm,  
He was pleased with the money ; 240  
He gave us a glass each  
Of strong, bitter brandy,  
And drank some himself  
With the vanquished Korójins,  
And gaily clinked glasses.  
“ It’s well that you yielded,”  
Said he, “ For I swear  
I was fully decided  
To strip off the last shred  
Of skins from your bodies 250  
And use it for making  
A drum for my soldiers !  
Ha, ha ! Ha, ha, ha ! ”  
(He was pleased with the notion.)  
“ A fine drum indeed ! ”

“ In silence we left ;  
But two stalwart old peasants  
Were chuckling together ;  
They’d two hundred roubles  
In notes, the old rascals ! 260  
Safe hidden away  
In the end of their coat-tails.  
They both had been yelling,  
“ We’re beggars ! We’re beggars ! ”  
So carried them home.  
“ Well, well, you may cackle ! ”  
I thought to myself,  
“ But the next time, be certain,  
You won’t laugh at me ! ”  
The others were also 270  
Ashamed of their weakness,  
And so by the ikens

We swore all together  
That next time we rather  
Would die of the beating  
Than feebly give way.  
It seems the Pomyéshchick  
Had taken a fancy  
At once to our roubles,  
Because after that 280  
Every year we were summoned  
To go to Korójin,  
We went, and were flogged.

“ ‘ Shaláshnikov flogged like  
A prince, but be certain  
The treasures he thrashed from  
The doughty Korójins  
Were not of much weight.  
The weak yielded soon,  
But the strong stood like iron 290  
For the commune. I also  
Bore up, and I thought :  
“ Though never so stoutly  
You flog us, you dog’s son,  
You won’t drag the whole soul  
From out of the peasant ;  
Some trace will be left.”

“ ‘ When the Barin was sated  
We went from the town,  
But we stopped on the outskirts 300  
To share what was over.  
And plenty there was, too !  
Shaláshnikov, heh,  
You’re a fool ! It was our turn  
To laugh at the Barin ;  
Ah, they were proud peasants—

The plucky Koró'jins !  
 But nowadays show them  
 The tail of a knout,  
 And they'll fly to the Barin, 310  
 And beg him to take

The last coin from their pockets.

Well, that's why we all lived  
 Like merchants in those days.

One summer came tidings  
 To us that our Barin

Now owned us no longer,  
 That he had, at Varna,

Been killed. We weren't sorry,  
 But somehow we thought then : 320

" The peasants' good fortune  
 Has come to an end ! "

The heir made a new move :  
 He sent us a German.<sup>1</sup>

Through vast, savage forests,  
 Through sly sucking bogs

And on foot came the German.  
 As bare as a finger.

" ' As melting as butter  
 At first was the German : 330

" Just give what you can, then,"  
 He'd say to the peasants.

" " " We've nothing to give ! "

" " " I'll explain to the Barin."

" " " Explain," we replied,  
 And were troubled no more.

<sup>1</sup> Germans were often employed as managers of the Pomyéshchicks' estates.

It seemed he was going  
 To live in the village ;  
 He soon settled down.  
 On the banks of the river, 340  
 For hour after hour  
 He sat peacefully fishing,  
 And striking his nose  
 Or his cheek or his forehead  
 We laughed : " You don't like ,  
 The Korójin mosquitoes ? "   
 He'd boat near the bankside  
 And shout with enjoyment,  
 Like one in the bath-house  
 Who's got to the roof.<sup>1</sup> 350

" " With youths and young maidens  
 He strolled in the forest  
 (They were not for nothing  
 Those strolls in the forest !)—  
 " Well, if you can't pay  
 You should work, little peasants."  
 " " " What work should we do ? "

" " " You should dig some deep ditches  
 To drain off the bog-lands."  
 We dug some deep ditches. 360  
 " " " And now trim the forest."

" " " Well, well, trim the forest. . . ."  
 We hacked and we hewed  
 As the German directed,  
 And when we look round  
 There's a road through the forest !

<sup>1</sup> In Russian vapour-baths there are shelves ranged round the walls for the bathers to recline upon. The higher the shelf the hotter the atmosphere.



“ ‘ The German went driving  
 To town with three horses ;  
 Look ! now he is coming  
     With boxes and bedding, 370  
 And God knows wherefrom  
     Has this bare-footed German  
 Raised wife and small children !  
     And now he’s established  
 A village ispravnik,<sup>1</sup>  
     They live like two brothers.  
 His courtyard at all times  
     Is teeming with strangers,  
 And woe to the peasants—  
     The fallen Korojins ! 380  
 He sucked us all dry  
     To the very last farthing ;  
 And flog !—like the soul  
     Of Shaláshnikov flogged he !  
 Shaláshnikov stopped  
     When he got what he wanted ;  
 He clung to our backs  
     Till he’d glutted his stomach,  
 And then he dropped down  
     Like a leech from a dog’s ear. 390  
 But he had the grip  
     Of a corpse—had this German ;  
 Until he had left you ,  
     Stripped bare like a beggar  
 You couldn’t escape.’

“ ‘ But how could you bear it ? ’

“ ‘ Ah, how could we bear it ?  
 Because we were giants—  
     Because by their patience

<sup>1</sup> Police-official.

The people of Russia 400  
 Are great, little Grandchild.  
 You think, then, Matróna,  
 That we Russian peasants  
 No warriors are ?  
 Why, truly the peasant  
 Does not live in armour,  
 Does not die in warfare,  
 But nevertheless  
 He's a warrior, child.  
 His hands are bound tight, 410  
 And his feet hung with fetters ;  
 His back—mighty forests  
 Have broken across it ;  
 His breast—I will tell you,  
 The Prophet Elijah  
 In chariot fiery  
 Is thundering within it ;  
 And these things the peasant  
 Can suffer in patience.  
 He bends—but he breaks not ; 420  
 He reels—but he falls not ;  
 Then is he not truly  
 A warrior, say ?

“ ‘ You joke, little Grandad ;  
 Such warriors, surely,  
 A tiny mouse nibbling  
 Could crumble to atoms,’  
 I said to Savyéli

“ ‘ I know not, Matróna,  
 But up till to-day 430  
 He has stood with his burden ;  
 He's sunk in the earth

'Neath its weight to his shoulders ;  
 His face is not moistened  
 With sweat, but with heart's blood.  
 I don't know what may  
 Come to pass in the future,  
 I can't think what will  
 Come to pass—only God knows  
 For my part, I know 440  
 When the storm howls in winter,  
 When old bones are painful,  
 I lie on the oven,  
 I lie, and am thinking :  
 “ Eh, you, strength of giants,  
 On what have they spent you ?  
 On what are you wasted ?  
 With whips and with rods  
 They will pound you to dust ! ”  
 “ ‘ But what of the German, 450  
 Savyéli ? ’

“ ‘ The German ?  
 Well, well, though he lived  
 Like a lord in his glory  
 For eighteen long years,  
 We were waiting our day.  
 Then the German considered  
 A factory needful,  
 And wanted a pit dug.  
 'Twas work for nine peasants. 460  
 We started at daybreak  
 And laboured till mid-day,  
 And then we were going  
 To rest and have dinner,  
 When up comes the German :

“ Eh, you, lazy devils !  
So little work done ? ”

He started to nag us,  
Quite coolly and slowly,  
Without heat or hurry ;  
For that was his way. 470

“ ‘ And we, tired and hungry,  
Stood listening in silence.  
He kicked the wet earth  
With his boot while he scolded,  
Not far from the edge  
Of the pit. I stood near him,  
And happened to give him  
A push with my shoulder ;  
Then somehow a second 480

And third pushed him gently. . . .  
We spoke not a word,  
Gave no sign to each other,  
But silently, slowly,  
Drew closer together,  
And edging the German  
Respectfully forward,

We brought him at last  
To the brink of the hollow.  
He tumbled in headlong ! 490  
“ A ladder ! ” he bellows ;  
Nine shovels reply.

“ Naddai ! ” <sup>1</sup>—the word fell  
From my lips on the instant,  
The word to which people  
Work gaily in Russia ;  
“ Naddai ! ” and “ Naddai ! ”  
And we laboured so bravely

<sup>1</sup> Heave-to !

That soon 'not a trace  
 Of the pit was remaining, 500  
 The earth was as smooth  
 As before we had touched it ;  
 And then we stopped short  
 And we looked at each other. . . .'

"The old man was silent.  
 'What further, Savyéli ?'

"What further ? Ah, bad times :  
 The prison in Buy-Town  
 (I learnt there my letters),  
 Until we were sentenced ; 510  
 The convict-mines later ;  
 And plenty of lashes.  
 But I never frowned  
 At the lash in the prison ;  
 They flogged us but poorly.  
 And later I nearly  
 Escaped to the forest ;  
 They caught me, however.  
 Of course they did not  
 Pat my head for their trouble ; 520  
 The Governor was through  
 Siberia famous  
 For flogging. But had not  
 Shaláshnikov flogged us ?  
 I spit at the floggings  
 I got in the prison !  
 Ah, he was a Master !  
 He knew how to flog you !  
 He toughened my hide so  
 You see it has served me 530  
 For one hundred years,

And 'twill serve me another.

But life was not easy,  
I tell you, Matróna :  
First twenty years prison,  
Then twenty years exile.

I saved up some money,  
And when I came home,  
BUILT this hut for myself.

And here I have lived 540  
For a great many years now.

They loved the old grandad  
So long as he'd money,  
But now it has gone  
They would part with him gladly,  
They spit in his face.

Eh, you plucky toy heroes !  
You're fit to make war  
Upon old men and women ! '

" And that was as much 550  
As the grandfather told me."

" And now for your story,"  
They answer Matróna.

" 'Tis not very bright.  
From one trouble God  
In His goodness preserved me ;  
For Sitnikov died

Of the cholera. Soon, though,  
Another arose,  
I will tell you about it." 560

" Naddai ! " say the peasants  
(They love the word well),  
They are filling the glasses.



The dark world is silent,  
But one little creature  
Is helplessly grieving  
And cannot find comfort ;—  
The nightingale only  
Laments for her children. . . .

She never will see them  
Again, though she call them  
Till breaks the white day. . . . 40  
I carried my baby

Asleep in my bosom  
To work in the meadows.  
But Mother-in-law cried,  
' Come, leave him behind you,  
At home with Savyéli,  
You'll work better then.'

And I was so timid,  
So tired of her scolding,  
I left him behind. 50

“ That year it so happened  
The harvest was richer  
Than ever we'd known it ;  
The reaping was hard,  
But the reapers were merry,  
I sang as I mounted  
The sheaves on the waggon.  
(The waggons are loaded  
To laughter and singing ;  
The sledg s in silence, 60  
With thoughts sad and bitter ;  
The waggons convey the corn  
Home to the peasants,  
The sledges will bear it  
Away to the market.)



“ But as I was working  
I heard of a sudden  
A deep groan of anguish :  
I saw old Savyéli  
Creep trembling towards me, 70  
His face white as death :  
‘ Forgive me, Matróna !  
Forgive me, Matróna !  
I sinned. . . . I was careless.’  
He fell at my feet.

“ Oh, stay, little swallow !  
Your nest build not there !  
Not there 'neath the leafless  
Bare bank of the river :  
The water will rise, 80  
And your children will perish.  
Oh, poor little woman,  
Young wife and young mother,  
The daughter-in-law .  
And the slave of the household,  
Bear blows and abuse,  
Suffer all things in silence,  
But let not your baby  
Be torn from your bosom. . . .  
Savyéli had fallen 90  
Asleep in the sunshine,  
And Djóma—the pigs  
Had attacked him and killed him.

“ I fell to the ground  
And lay writhing in torture ;  
I bit the black earth  
And I shrieked in wild anguish ;

I called on his name,  
 And I thought in my madness  
 My voice must awake him. . . . 100

“ Hark !—horses’ hoofs stamping,<sup>1</sup>  
 And harness-bells jangling—  
 Another misfortune !  
 The children are frightened,  
 They run to the houses ;  
 And outside the window  
 The old men and women  
 Are talking in whispers  
 And nodding together. 110

The Elder is running  
 And tapping each window  
 In turn with his staff ;  
 Then he runs to the hayfields,  
 He runs to the pastures,  
 To summon the people.  
 They come, full of sorrow—  
 Another misfortune !

And God in His wrath  
 Has sent guests that are hateful,  
 Has sent unjust judges. 120  
 Perhaps they want money ?  
 Their coats are worn threadbare ?  
 Perhaps they are hungry ?

“ Without greeting Christ  
 They sit down at the table,

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph refers to the custom of the country police in Russia, who, on hearing of the accidental death of anybody in a village, will, in order to extract bribes from the villagers, threaten to hold an inquest on the corpse. The peasants are usually ready to part with nearly all they possess in order to save their dead from what they consider desecration.

They've set up an icon  
And cross in the middle ;  
Our pope, Father John,  
Swears the witnesses singly.

“ They question Savyéli, 130  
And then a policeman  
Is sent to find me,  
While the officer, swearing,  
Is striding about  
Like a beast in the forest. . . .  
‘ Now, woman, confess it,’  
He cries when I enter,  
‘ You lived with the peasant  
Savyéli in sin ? ’

“ I whisper in answer, 140  
‘ Kind sir, you are joking.  
I am to my husband  
A wife without stain,  
And the peasant Savyéli  
Is more than a hundred  
Years old ;—you can see it.’

“ He's stamping about  
Like a horse in the stable ;  
In fury he's thumping  
His fist on the table. 150  
‘ Be silent ! Confess, then,  
That you with Savyéli  
Had plotted to murder  
Your child ! ’

“ Holy Mother !  
What horrible ravings !

My God, give me patience,  
And let me not strangle  
The wicked blasphemer !  
I looked at the doctor 160  
And shuddered in terror :  
Before him lay lancets,  
Sharp scissors, and knives.  
I conquered myself,  
For I knew why they lay there.  
I answer him trembling,  
' I loved little Djóma,  
I would not have harmed him.'

" And did you not poison him.  
Give him some powder ? ' 170

" Oh, Heaven forbid ! '  
I kneel to him crying,  
' Be gentle ! Have mercy !  
And grant that my baby  
In honour be buried,  
Forbid them to thrust  
The cruel knives in his body !  
Oh, I am his mother ! '

" Can anything move them ?  
No hearts they possess, 180  
In their eyes is no conscience,  
No cross at their throats. . . .

" They have lifted the napkin  
Which covered my baby ;  
His little white body  
With scissors and lancets  
They worry and torture. . .

The room has grown darker,  
I'm struggling and screaming,  
' You butchers ! You fiends ! 190  
Not on earth, not on water,  
And not on God's temple  
My tears shall be showered ;  
But straight on the souls  
Of my hellish tormentors !  
Oh, hear me, just God !  
May Thy curse fall and strike them !  
Ordain that their garments  
May rot on their bodies !  
Their eyes be struck blind, 200  
And their brains scorch in madness !  
Their wives be unfaithful,  
Their children be crippled !  
Oh, hear me, just God !  
Hear the prayers of a mother,  
And look on her tears,—  
Strike these pitiless devils !'  
“ ‘ She's crazy, the woman ! ’  
The officer shouted,  
' Why did you not tell us 210  
Before ? Stop this fooling !  
Or else I shall order  
My men, here, to bind you.'  
“ I sank on the bench,  
I was trembling all over ;  
I shook like a leaf  
As I gazed at the doctor ;  
His sleeves were rolled backwards,  
A knife was in one hand,  
A cloth in the other, 220  
And blood was upon it ;

His glasses were fixed  
On his nose. All was silent.  
The officer's pen  
Began scratching on paper ;  
The motionless peasants  
Stood gloomy and mournful ;  
The pope lit his pipe  
And sat watching the doctor.  
He said, ' You are reading 230  
A heart with a knife.'  
I started up wildly ;  
I knew that the doctor  
Was piercing the heart  
Of my little dead baby.

" ' Now, bind her, the vixen ! '  
The officer shouted ;—  
' She's mad ! ' He began  
To inquire of the peasants,  
' Have none of you noticed 240  
Before that the woman  
Korchágin is crazy ? '

" ' No,' answered the peasants.  
And then Philip's parents  
He asked, and their children ;  
They answered, ' Oh, no, sir !  
We never remarked it.'  
He asked old Savyélí.—  
' There's one thing,' he answered,  
' That might make one think 250  
That Matróna is crazy :  
She's come here this morning  
Without bringing with her  
A present of money  
Or cloth to appease you.'

“ And then the old man  
Began bitterly crying.  
The officer frowning  
Sat down and said nothing.  
And then I remembered : 260  
In truth it was madness—  
The piece of new linen  
Which I had made ready  
Was still in my box—  
I’d forgotten to bring it ;  
And now I had seen them  
Seize Djómushka’s body  
And tear it to pieces.  
I think at that moment  
I turned into marble : 270  
I watched while the doctor  
Was drinking some vodka  
And washing his hands ;  
I saw how he offered  
The glass to the pope,  
And I heard the pope answer,  
‘ Why ask me ? We mortals  
Are pitiful sinners,—  
We don’t need much urging  
To empty a glass ! ’ 280

“ The peasants are standing  
In fear, and are thinking :  
‘ Now, how did these vultures  
Get wind of the matter ?  
Who told them that here  
There was chance of some profit ?  
They dashed in like wolves,  
Seized the beards of the peasants,  
And snarled in their faces  
Like savage hyenas ! ’ 290

“ And now they are feasting,  
 Are eating and drinking ;  
 They chat with the pope,  
 He is murmuring to them,  
 ‘ The people in these parts  
 Are beggars and drunken ;  
 They owe me for countless  
 Confessions and weddings ; ‘  
 They’ll take their last farthing  
 To spend in the tavern ; 300  
 And nothing but sins  
 Do they bring to their priest.’

“ And then I hear singing  
 In clear, girlish voices—  
 I know them all well :  
 There’s Natásha and Glásha,  
 And Dáriushka.—Jesus  
 Have mercy upon them !  
 Hark ! steps and accordion ;  
 Then there is silence. 310  
 I think I had fallen  
 Asleep ; then I fancied  
 That somebody entering  
 Bent over me, saying,  
 ‘ Sleep, woman of sorrows,  
 Exhausted by sorrow,’  
 And making the sign  
 Of the cross on my forehead.  
 I felt that the ropes  
 On my body were loosened, 320  
 And then I remembered  
 No more. In black darkness  
 I woke, and astonished  
 I ran to the window :



Deep night lay around me—  
What's happened? Where am I?  
I ran to the street,—  
It was empty, in Heaven  
No moon and no stars,  
And a great cloud of darkness 330  
Spread over the village.  
The huts of the peasants  
Were dark; only one hut  
Was brilliantly lighted,  
It shone like a palace—  
The hut of Savyéli.  
I ran to the doorway,  
And then . . . I remembered.

“The table was gleaming  
With yellow wax candles, 340  
And there, in the midst,  
Lay a tiny white coffin,  
And over it spread  
Was a fine coloured napkin,  
An icon was placed  
At its head. . . .

O you builders,  
For my little son  
What a house you have fashioned!  
No windows you've made 350  
That the sunshine may enter,  
No stove and no bench,  
And no soft little pillows. . . .  
Oh, Djómushka will not  
Feel happy within it,  
He cannot sleep well. . . .  
'Begone!'—I cried harshly  
On seeing Savyéli;

He stood near the coffin  
 And read from the book 360  
 In his hand, through his glasses.  
 I cursed old Sávýéli,  
 Cried—‘ Branded one ! Convict !  
 Begone ! ’Twas you killed him !  
 You murdered my Djóma,  
 Begone from my sight ! ’

‘ He stood without moving ;  
 He crossed himself thrice  
 And continued his reading.  
 But when I grew calmer 370  
 Sávýéli approached me,  
 And said to me gently,  
 ‘ In winter, Matróna,  
 I told you my story,  
 But yet there was more.  
 Our forests were endless,  
 Our lakes wild and lonely,  
 Our people were savage ;  
 By cruelty lived we :  
 By snaring the wood-grouse, 380  
 By slaying the bears :—  
 You must kill or you perish !  
 I’ve told you of Barin  
 Shaláshnikov, also  
 Of how we were robbed  
 By the villainous German,  
 And ther of the prison,  
 The exile, the mines.  
 My heart was like stone,  
 I grew wild and ferocious. 390  
 My winter had lasted  
 A century, Grandchild,

But your little Djóma  
Had melted its frosts.  
One day as I rocked him  
He smiled of a sudden,  
And I smiled in answer. . . .  
A strange thing befell me  
Some days after that :  
As I prowled in the forest 400  
I aimed at a squirrel ;  
But suddenly noticed  
How happy and playful  
It was, in the branches :  
Its bright little face  
With its paw it sat washing.  
I lowered my gun :—  
“ You shall live, little squirrel ! ”  
I rambled about  
In the woods, in the meadows, 410  
And each tiny floweret  
I loved. I went home then  
And nursed little Djóma,  
And played with him, laughing.  
God knows how I loved him,  
The innocent babe !  
And now . . . through my folly,  
My sin, . . . he has perished. . . .  
Upbraid me and kill me,  
But nothing can help you, 420  
With God one can't argue. . . .  
Stand up now, Matróna,  
And pray for your baby ;  
God acted with reason :  
He's counted the joys  
In the life of a peasant ! ’

“ Long, long did Savyéli  
Stand bitterly speaking,  
The piteous fate  
Of the peasant he painted ;                    430  
And if a rich Barin,  
A merchant or noble,  
If even our Father  
The Tsar had been listening,  
Savyéli could not  
Have found words which were truer.  
Have spoken them better. . . .

“ ‘ Now Djóma is happy  
And safe, in God’s Heaven,’  
He said to me later.                                440  
His tears began falling. . . ,

“ ‘ I do not complain  
That God took him, Savyéli,’  
I said,—“but the insult  
They did him torments me,  
It’s racking my heart.  
Why did vicious black ravens  
Alight on his body  
And tear it to pieces ?  
Will neither our God                                450  
Nor our Tsar—Little Father—  
Arise to defend us ? ’

“ ‘ But God, little Grandchild,  
Is high, and the Tsar  
Far away,’ said Savyéli.

“ ‘ I cried, ‘ Yet I’ll reach them ! ’

“ But Grandfather answered,  
‘ Now hush, little Grandchild,  
You woman of sorrow,  
Bow down and have patience; 460  
No truth you will find  
In the world, and no justice.’

“ ‘ But why then, Savyéli ? ’

“ ‘ A bondswoman, Grandchild  
You are ; and for such  
Is no hope,’ said Savyéli.

“ For long I sat darkly  
And bitterly thinking.  
The thunder pealed forth  
And the windows were shaken ; 470  
I started ! Savyéli  
Drew nearer and touched me,  
And led me to stand  
By the little white coffin :

“ ‘ Now pray that the Lord  
May have placed little Djóma  
Among the bright ranks  
Of His angels,’ he whispered ;  
A candle he placed  
In my hand. . . . And I knelt there 480  
The whole of the night  
Till the pale dawn of daybreak :  
The grandfather stood  
Beside Djómushka’s coffin  
And read from the book  
In a measured low voice. . . . ”

## CHAPTER V

## THE SHE-WOLF

“ ’Tis twenty years now  
 Since my Djóma was taken,  
 Was carried to sleep  
 ’Neath his little grass blanket ;  
 And still my heart bleeds,  
 And I pray for him always,  
 No apple till Spassa <sup>1</sup>  
 I touch with my lips. . . .

“ For long I lay ill,  
 Not a word did I utter, 10  
 My eyes could not suffer  
 The old man, Savyéli.  
 No work did I do,  
 And my Father-in-law thought  
 To give me a lesson  
 And took down the horse-reins ;  
 I bowed to his feet,  
 And cried—‘ Kill me ! Oh, kill me !  
 I pray for the end ! ’  
 He hung the reins up, then. 20  
 I lived day and night  
 On the grave of my Djóma,  
 I dusted it clean  
 With a soft little napkin  
 That grass might grow green,  
 And I prayed for my lost one.  
 I yearned for my parents :  
 ‘ Oh, you have forgotten,  
 Forgotten your daughter ! ’

<sup>1</sup> The Saviour’s day

“ ‘ We have not forgotten 30  
     Our poor little daughter,  
 But is it worth while, say,  
     To wear the grey horse out  
 By such a long journey  
     To learn about your woes,  
 To tell you of ours ?  
     Since long, little daughter,  
 Would father and mother  
     Have journeyed to see you,  
 But ever the thought rose : 40  
     She'll weep at our coming,  
 She'll shriek when we leave ! ’

    In winter came Philip,  
 Our sorrow together  
     We shared, and together  
 We fought with our grief  
     In the grandfather's hut.”  
 “ The grandfather died, then ? ”

    “ Oh, no, in his cottage  
 For seven whole days 50  
     He lay still without speaking,  
 And then he got up  
     And he went to the forest ;  
 And there old Savyél  
     So wept and lamented,  
     The woods were set throbbing.  
 In autumn he left us  
     And went as a pilgrim  
 On foot to do penance  
     At some distant convent. . . . 60

    “ I went with my husband  
 To visit my parents,

And then began working  
 Again. Three years followed,  
 Each week like the other,  
 As twin to twin brother,  
 And each year a child.

There was no time for thinking  
 And no time for grieving ;

Praise God if you have time 70  
 For getting your work done  
 And crossing your forehead.  
 You eat—when there's something  
 Left over at table,  
 When elders have eaten,  
 When children have eaten ;  
 You sleep—when you're ill. . . .

“ In the fourth year came sorrow  
 Again ; for when sorrow

Once lightens upon you 80  
 To death he pursues you ; ‘  
 He circles before you—

A bright shining falcon ;  
 He hovers behind you—

An ugly black raven ;  
 He flies in advance—

But he will not forsake you ;  
 He lingers behind—

But he will not forget. . . . .

“ I lost my dear” parents. 90  
 The dark nights alone knew

The grief of the orphan ;  
 No need is there, brothers,•

To tell you about it.

With tears did I water

The grave of my baby.



From far once I noticed  
 A wooden cross standing  
 Erect at its head,  
 And a little gilt icon ; 100  
 A figure is kneeling  
 Before it—‘ Savyéli !  
 From whence have you come ? ’

“ ‘ I have come from Pesótna.  
 I’ve prayed for the soul  
 Of our dear little Djóma ;  
 I’ve prayed for the peasants  
 Of Russia. . . . Matróna,  
 Once more do I pray—  
 Oh, Matróna . . . Matróna. . . . 110  
 I pray that the heart  
 Of the mother, at last,  
 May be softened towards me.  
 Forgive me, Matróna ! ’

“ ‘ Oh, long, long ago  
 I forgave you, Savyéli.’

“ ‘ Then look at me now  
 As in old times, Matróna ! ’

“ ‘ I looked as of old.  
 Then up rose Savyéli, 120  
 And gazed in my eyes ;  
 He was trying to straighten  
 His stiffened old back ;  
 Like the snow was his hair now.  
 I kissed the old man,  
 And my new grief I told him ;  
 For long we sat weeping  
 And mourning together.  
 He did not live long

After that. In the autumn 130

A deep wound appeared  
In his neck and he sickened.

He died very hard.  
For a hundred days, fully,  
No food passed his lips ;  
To the bone he was shrunken

He laughed at himself :  
' Tell me, truly, Matróna, "  
Now am I not like

A Korójin mosquito ? ' 140

At times the old man

Would be gentle and patient ;  
At times he was angry  
And nothing would please him ;  
He frightened us all

By his outbursts of fury .  
' Eh, plough not, and sow not,  
You downtrodden peasants !

You women, sit spinning  
And weaving no longer ! 150

However you struggle,  
You fools, you must perish !

You will not escape  
What by fate has been written !

Three roads are spread out  
For the peasant to follow—

They lead to the tavern,  
The mines, and the prison !

Three nooses are hung  
For the women of Russia : 160

The one is of white silk,  
The second of red silk,  
The third is of black silk—

Choose that which you please !'  
And Grandfather laughed  
In a manner which caused us  
To tremble with fear  
And draw nearer together. . . .  
He died in the night,  
And we did as he asked us . 170  
We laid him to rest  
In the grave beside Djóma.  
The Grandfather lived  
To a hundred and seven. . . .

“ Four years passed away then,  
The one like the other,  
And I was submissive,  
The slave of the household,  
For Mother-in-law  
And her husband the drunkard, 180  
For Sister-in-law  
By all suitors rejected.  
I'd draw off their boots—  
Only,—touch not my children !  
For them I stood firm  
Like a rock. Once it happened  
A pilgrim arrived  
At our village—a holy  
And pious-tongued woman ;  
She spoke to the people 190  
Of how to please God  
And of how to reach Heaven.  
She said that on fast-days  
No woman should offer  
The breast to her child.  
The women obeyed her : •  
On Wednesdays and Fridays

The village was filled  
By the wailing of babies ;  
And many a mother 200  
Sat bitterly weeping  
To hear her child cry  
For its food—full of pity,  
But fearing God's anger.  
But I did not listen !  
I said to myself  
That if penance were needful  
The mothers must suffer,  
But not little children.  
I said, ' I am guilty, 210  
My God—not my children ! '

" It seems God was angry  
And punished me for it  
Through my little son ;  
My Father-in-law  
To the commune had offered  
My little Fedótka  
As help to the shepherd  
When he was turned eight. . . . 220  
One night I was waiting  
To give him his supper ;  
The cattle already  
Were home, but he came not.  
I went through the village  
And saw that the people  
Were gathered together  
And talking of something.  
I listened, then elbowed  
My way through the people ;  
Fedótka was set 230  
In their midst, pale and trembling,

The Elder was gripping  
His ear. 'What has happened ?  
And why do you hold him ?'  
I said to the Elder.

" ' I'm going to beat him,—  
He threw a young lamb  
To the wolf,' he replied.

" I snatched my Fedótka  
Away from their clutches ;  
And somehow the Elder  
Fell down on the ground !

" The story was strange :  
It appears that the shepherd  
Went home for awhile,  
Leaving little Fedótka  
In charge of the flock.  
' I was sitting,' he told me,  
' Alone on the hillside,  
When all of a sudden .

A wolf ran close by me  
And picked Masha's lamb up.  
I threw myself at her,  
I whistled and shouted,  
I cracked with my whip,  
Blew my horn for Valétka,  
And then I gave chase.

I run fast, little Mother,  
But still I could never  
Have followed the robber  
If not for the traces

She left ; because, Mother,  
Her breasts hung so low  
(She was suckling her children)

They dragged on the earth  
 And left two tracks of blood.  
 But further the grey one  
 Went slower and slower ;  
 And then she looked back  
 And she saw I was coming. 270  
 At last she sat down.  
 With my whip then I lashed her ;  
 " Come, give me the lamb,  
 You grey devil ! " She crouched,  
 But would not give it up.  
 I said—" I must save it  
 Although she should kill me."  
 I threw myself on her  
 And snatched it away,  
 But she did not attack me. 280  
 The lamb was quite dead,  
 She herself was scarce living.  
 She gnashed with her teeth  
 And her breathing was heavy ;  
 And two streams of blood ran  
 From under her body:  
 Her ribs could be counted,  
 Her head was hung down,  
 But her eyes, little Mother,  
 Looked straight into mine . . . 290  
 Then she groaned of a sudden,  
 She groaned, and it sounded  
 As if she were crying.  
 I threw her 'the lamb.' . . .

" Well, that was the story.  
 And foolish Fedótka  
 Ran back to the village  
 And told them about it.

And they, in their anger,  
Were going to beat him 300  
When I came upon them.  
The Elder, because  
Of his fall, was indignant,  
He shouted—‘How dare you !  
Do you want a beating  
Yourself?’ And the woman  
Whose lamb had been stolen  
Cried, ‘Whip the lad soundly,  
’Twill teach him a lesson !’  
Fedótka she pulled from 310  
My arms, and he trembled,  
He shook like a leaf.

“Then the horns of the huntsmen  
Were heard,—the Pomyéshchick  
Returning from hunting.  
I ran to him, crying,  
‘Oh, save us ! Protect us !’

“‘What’s wrong ? Call the Elder !’  
And then, in an instant,  
The matter is settled : 320  
‘The shepherd is tiny—  
His youth and his folly  
May well be forgiven.  
The woman’s presumption  
You’ll punish severely !’

“‘Oh, Barin, God bless you !’  
I danced with delight !  
‘Fedótka is safe now !  
Run home, quick, Fedótka.’

“‘Your will shall be done, sir,’ 330

The Elder said, bowing ;  
 ‘ Now, woman, prepare ;  
 You can dance later on ! ’

“ A gossip then whispered,  
 ‘ Fall down at the feet  
 Of the Elder—beg mercy ! ’

“ ‘ Fedótka—go home ! ’ .

“ Then I kissed him, and told him :  
 ‘ Remember, Fedótka,  
 That I shall be angry 340  
 If once you look backwards.  
 Run home ! ’

“ Well, my brothers,  
 To leave out a word  
 Of the song is to spoil it,—  
 I lay on the ground. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

“ I crawled like a cat  
 To Fedótushka’s corner  
 That night. He was sleeping,  
 He tossed in his dream. 350  
 One hand was hung down,  
 While the other, clenched tightly,  
 Was shielding his eyes :

‘ You’ve been crying, my treasure ;  
 Sleep, darling, it’s nothing—  
 See, Mother as near ! ’

I’d lost little Djóma  
 While heavy with this one ;  
 He was but a weakling,  
 But grew very clever. 360  
 He works with his dad now,



And built such a chimney  
With him, for his master,  
The like of it never  
Was seen. Well, I sat there  
The whole of the night  
By the sweet little shepherd.  
At daybreak I crossed him,  
I fastened his laputs,  
I gave him his wallet,  
His horn and his whip.  
The rest began stirring,  
But nothing I told them  
Of all that had happened,  
But that day I stayed  
From the work in the fields.

370

“ I went to the banks  
Of the swift little river,  
I sought for a spot  
Which was silent and lonely  
Amid the green rushes  
That grow by the bank.

380

“ And on the grey stone  
I sat down, sick and weary,  
And leaning my head  
On my hands, I lamented,  
Poor sorrowing orphan.  
And loudly I called  
On the names of my parents :  
‘ Oh, come, little Father,  
My tender protector !  
Oh, look at the daughter  
You cherished and loved ! ’

390

“ In vain do I call him !

The loved one has left me ;  
The guest without lord,  
Without race, without kindred,  
Named Death, has appeared,  
And has called him away.

“ And wildly I summon 400  
My mother, my mother !  
The boisterous wind cries,  
The distant hills answer,  
But mother is dead,  
She can hear me no longer !

· You grieved day and night,  
And you prayed for me always,  
But never, beloved,  
Shall I see you again ;  
You cannot turn back now, 410  
And I may not follow.

“ A pathway so strange,  
So unknown, you have chosen,  
The beasts cannot find it,  
The winds cannot reach it,  
My voice will be lost  
In the terrible distance. . . .

“ My loving protectors,  
If you could but see me !  
Could know what your daughter 420  
Must suffer without you !  
Could learn of the people  
To whom you have left her !

“ By night bathed in tears,  
And by day weak and trembling,  
I bow like the grass

To the wind, but in secret  
A heart full of fury  
Is gnawing my breast ! ”

## CHAPTER VI

## AN UNLUCKY YEAR

“ Strange stars played that year  
On the face of the Heavens ;  
And some said, ‘ The Lord rides  
Abroad, and His angels  
With long flaming brooms sweep  
The floor of the Heavens  
In front of his carriage.’  
But others were frightened,—  
They said, ‘ It is rather  
The Antichrist coming !  
It signals misfortune ! ’  
And they read it truly.  
A terrible year came,  
A terrible famine,  
When brother denied  
To his brother a morsel.  
And then I remembered  
The wolf that was hungry,  
For I was like her,  
Craving food for my children.  
Now Mother-in-law found  
A new superstition :  
She said to the neighbours  
That I was the reason  
Of all the misfortune ;  
And why ? I had caused it

10

20

## THE PEASANT WOMAN

By changing my shirt  
On the day before Christmas !  
Well, I escaped lightly,  
For I had a husband 30  
To shield and protect me,  
But one woman, having  
Offended, was beaten  
To death by the people.  
To play with the starving  
Is dangerous, my friends.

“ The famine was scarcely  
At end, when another  
Misfortune befell us—  
The dreaded recruiting. 40  
But I was not troubled  
By that, because Philip  
Was safe : one already  
Had served of his people.  
One night I sat working,  
My husband, his brothers,  
The family, all had  
Been out since the morning.  
My Father-in-law  
Had been called to take part 50  
In the communal meeting.  
The women were standing  
And chatting with neighbours.  
But I was exhausted,  
For then I was heavy  
With child. I was ailing,  
And hourly expected  
My time. When the children  
Were fed and asleep  
I lay down on the oven. 60

The women came home soon  
And called for their suppers ;

But Father-in-law  
Had not come, so we waited.

He came, tired and gloomy .  
' Eh, wife, we are ruined !

I'm weary with running,  
But nothing can save us :  
They've taken the eldest—

Now give them the youngest <sup>1</sup> 70  
I've counted the years

To a day—I have proved them ;  
They listen to nothing.

• They want to take Philip !  
I prayed to the commune—

But what is it worth ?  
I ran to the bailiff ;

He swore he was sorry,  
But couldn't assist us.

I went to the clerk then ; 80  
You might just as well

Set to work with a hatchet  
To chop out the shadows

Up there, on the ceiling,  
As try to get truth

Out of that little rascal !  
He's bought. They are all bought,—  
Not one of them honest !

If only he knew it—  
The Governor—he'd teach them ! 90

If he would but order  
The commune to show him

The lists of the volost,  
And see how they cheat us !'

The mother and daughters

Are groaning and crying ,  
 But I ! I am cold  
 I am burning in fever !  
 My thoughts I have no thoughts !  
 I think I am dreaming ! 100  
 My fatherless children  
 Are standing before me,  
 And crying with hunger  
 The family, frowning,  
 Looks coldly upon them . . .  
 At home they are ' noisy,'  
 At play they are ' clumsy,'  
 At table they're ' gluttons,'  
 And somebody threatens  
 To punish my children— 110  
 They slap them and pinch them !  
 Be silent, you mother !  
 You wife of a soldier !

\* \* \* \*

" I now have no part  
 In the village allotments,  
 No share in the building,  
 The clothes, and the cattle,  
 And these are my riches  
 Three lakes of salt tear-drops,  
 Three fields sown with grief ! 120

\* \* \* \*

" And now, like a sinner,  
 I bow to the neighbours ,  
 I ask their forgiveness ,  
 I hear myself saying,  
 ' Forgive me for being  
 So haughty and proud !  
 I little expected

That God, for my pride,  
Would have left me forsaken !

I pray you, good people, 130  
To show me more wisdom,  
To teach me to live

And to nourish my children,  
What food they should have,  
And what drink, and what teaching ,

\* \* \* \*

‘ I’m sending my children  
To beg in the village ,  
‘ Go, children, beg humbly,  
But dare not to steal ’

‘ The children are sobbing, 140  
‘ It’s cold, little Mother,

Our clothes are in rags ,  
We are weary of passing

From doorway to doorway ,

We stand by the windows  
And shiver We’re frightened

To beg of the rich folk ,  
The poor ones say, “ God will  
Provide for the orphans ! ”

We cannot come home, 150

For if we bring nothing  
We know you’ll be angry ! ,

\* \* \* \*

“ To go to God’s church  
I have made myself tidy ,  
I hear how the neighbours  
Are laughing around me

‘ Now who is she setting  
Her cap at ? ’ they whisper ,

\* \* \* \*

“ Don’t wash yourself clean.  
 And don’t dress yourself nicely ;      160  
 The neighbours are sharp—  
     They have eyes like the eagle  
 And tongues like the serpent.  
     Walk humbly and slowly,  
 Don’t laugh when you’re cheerful,  
     Don’t weep when you’re sad.  
     \*            \*            \*            \*            \*

“ The dull, endless winter  
     Has come, and the fields  
 And the pretty green meadows  
     Are hidden away      170  
 ’Neath the snow. Nothing living  
     Is seen in the folds  
 Of the gleaming white grave-clothes.  
     No friend under Heaven  
 There is for the woman,  
     The wife of the soldier.  
 Who knows what her thoughts are ?  
     Who cares for her words ?  
 Who is sad for her sorrow ?  
     And where can she bury      180  
 The insults they cast her ?  
 Perhaps in the woods ?—  
     But the woods are all withered !  
 Perhaps in the meadows ?—  
     The meadows are frozen !  
 The swift little stream ?—  
     But its waters are sleeping !  
 No,—carry them with you  
     To hide in your grave !  
     \*        \*            \*            \*            \*

“ My husband is gone ;      190



There is no one to shield me  
 Hark, hark ! There's the drum !  
 And the soldiers are coming !  
 They halt ;—they are forming  
 A line in the market.  
 ' Attention ! ' There's Philip !  
 There's Philip ! I see him !  
 ' Attention ! Eyes front ! '  
 It's Shalashnikov shouting. . . .  
 Oh, Philip has fallen ! 200  
 Have mercy ! Have mercy !  
 ' Try that—try some physic !  
 You'll soon get to like it !  
 Ha, ha ! Ha, ha, ha ! '  
 He is striking my husband !  
 ' I flog, not with whips,  
 But with knouts made for giants ! '  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 " I sprang from the stove,  
 Though my burden was heavy ;  
 I listen. . . . All silent. . . . 210  
 The family sleeping.  
 I creep to the doorway  
 And open it softly,  
 I pass down the street  
 Through the night. . . . It is frosty.  
 In Domina's hut,  
 Where the youths and young maidens  
 Assemble at night,  
 They are singing in chorus  
 My favourite song : 220  
 " ' The fir tree on the mountain stands,  
 The little cottage at its foot,  
 And Máshenka is there.

Her father comes to look for her,  
 He wakens her and coaxes her :  
 " Eh, Máshenka, come home, ' he cries,  
 " Efeémovna, come home ! "

" " " I won't come, and I won't listen !  
 Black the night—no moon in Heaven !  
 Swift the stream—no bridge, no ferry !  
 Dark the wood—no guards, " 231

" " The fir tree on the mountain stands,  
 The little cottage at its foot,  
 And Máshenka is there.  
 Her mother comes to look for her,  
 She wakens her and coaxes her :  
 " Now, Máshenka, come home, " she says,  
 " Efeémovna, come home ! "

" " " I won't come, and I won't listen !  
 Black the night—no moon in Heaven !  
 Swift the stream—no bridge, no ferry !  
 Dark the wood—no guards ! " 242

" " The fir tree on the mountain stands,  
 The little cottage at its foot,  
 And Máshenka is there.  
 Young Peter comes to look for her,  
 He wakens her, and coaxes her :  
 " Oh, Máshenka, come home with me !  
 My little dove, Efeémovna,  
 Come home, my dear, with me. " 250

" " " I will come, and I will listen,  
 Fair the night—the moon in Heaven,  
 Calm the stream with bridge and ferry,  
 In the wood strong guards. " " "

## CHAPTER VII

## THE GOVERNOR'S LADY

“ I'm hurrying blindly,  
I've run through the village ;  
Yet strangely the singing  
From Domina's cottage  
Pursues me and rings  
In my ears. My pace slackens,  
I rest for awhile,  
And look back at the village :  
I see the white snowdrift  
O'er valley and meadow,  
The moon in the Heavens,  
My self, and my shadow. . .”

10

“ I do not feel frightened ;  
A flutter of gladness  
Awakes in my bosom,  
‘ You brisk winter breezes,  
My thanks for your freshness !  
I crave for your breath  
As the sick man for water.’  
My mind has grown clear,  
To my knees I am falling :  
‘ O Mother of Christ !  
I beseech Thee to tell me  
Why God is so angry  
With me. Holy Mother !  
No tiniest bone  
In my limbs is unbroken ;  
No nerve in my body  
Uncrushed. I am patient,—

20

I have not complained. 30  
All the strength that God gave me  
I've spent on my work ;  
All the love on my children.  
But Thou seest all things,  
And Thou art so mighty ;  
Oh, succour thy slave !'

" I love now to pray  
On a night clear and frosty ;  
To kneel on the earth  
'Neath the stars in the winter. 40  
Remember, my brothers,  
If trouble befall you,  
To counsel your women  
To pray in that manner ;  
In no other place  
Can one pray so devoutly,  
At no other season. . . .

" I prayed and grew stronger ;  
I bowed my hot head  
To the cool snowy napkin, 50  
And quickly my fever  
Was spent. And when later  
I looked at the roadway  
I found that I knew it ;  
I'd passed it before  
On the mild summer evenings ;  
At morning I'd greeted  
The sunrise upon it  
In haste to be off  
To the fair. And I walked now 60  
The whole of the night  
Without meeting a soul. . . .

But now to the cities  
The sledges are starting,  
Piled high with the hay  
Of the peasants. I watch them,  
And pity the horses :  
Their lawful provision  
Themselves they are dragging  
Away from the courtyard ; 70  
And afterwards they  
Will be hungry. I pondered : ,  
The horses that work  
Must eat straw, while the idlers  
Are fed upon oats.  
But when Need comes he hastens  
To empty your corn-lofts,  
Won't wait to be asked. . . .

“ I come within sight  
Of the town. On the outskirts 80  
The merchants are cheating  
And wheedling the peasants,  
There's shouting and swearing,  
Abusing and coaxing.

“ I enter the town  
As the bell rings for matins.  
I make for the market  
Before the cathedral.  
I know that the gates  
Of the Governor's courtyard 90  
Are there. It is dark still,  
The square is quite empty ;  
In front of the courtyard  
A sentinel paces :  
' Pray tell me, good man,  
Does the Governor rise early ? '

“ Don't know. Go away.  
I'm forbidden to chatter.’

(I give him some farthings.)

‘ Well, go to the porter ;  
He knows all about it.’ 100

“ ‘ Where is he ? And what  
Is his name, little sentry ? ’

“ ‘ Makhár Fedosséich,  
He stands at the entrance.’  
I walk to the entrance,  
The doors are not opened.  
I sit on the doorsteps  
And think. . . .

“ It grows lighter,  
A man with a ladder  
Is turning the lamps down. 110

“ ‘ Heh, what are you doing ?  
And how did you enter ? ’

“ I start in confusion,  
I see in the doorway  
A bald-headed man  
In a bed-gown. Then quickly  
I come to my senses,  
And bowing before him 120  
(Makhár Fedosséich),  
I give him a rouble.

“ ‘ I come in great need  
To the Governor, and see him  
I must, little Uncle ! ’

“ ‘ You can't see him, woman.  
Well, well. . . . I'll consider. . . .  
Return in two hours.’

“ I see in the market  
A pedestal standing, 130  
A peasant upon it,  
He's just like Savyél,  
And all made of brass :  
It's Susánin's memorial.  
While crossing the market  
I'm suddenly startled—  
A heavy grey drake  
From a cook is escaping ;  
The fellow pursues  
With a knife. It is shrieking. 140  
My God, what a sound !  
To the soul it has pierced me.  
( 'Tis only the knife  
That can wring such a shriek.)  
The cook has now caught it ;  
It stretches its neck,  
Begins angrily hissing,  
As if it would frighten  
The cook,—the poor creature !  
I run from the market, 150  
I'm trembling and thinking,  
‘ The drake will grow calm  
'Neath the kiss of the knife ! ’

“ The Governor's dwelling  
Again is before me,  
With balconies, turrets,  
And steps which are covered  
With beautiful carpets.

I gaze at the windows  
All shaded with curtains. 160  
'Now, which is your chamber,'  
I think, 'my desired one?'  
Say, do you sleep sweetly?  
Of what are you dreaming?'  
I creep up the doorsteps,  
And keep to the side  
Not to tread on the carpets;  
And there, near the entrance,  
I wait for the porter.

" 'You're early, my gossip! ' 170  
Again I am startled:  
A stranger I see,—  
For at first I don't know him;  
A livery richly  
Embroidered he wears now;  
He holds a fine staff;  
He's not bald any longer!  
He laughs—'You were frightened?'

" 'I'm tired, little Uncle.'

" 'You've plenty of courage, 180  
God's mercy be yours!  
Come, give me another,  
And I will befriend you.'

" (I give him a rouble.)  
'Now come, I will make you  
Some tea in my office.'

" His den is just under  
The stairs. There's a bedstead,



A little iron stove,  
And a candlestick in it, 190  
A big samovar,  
And a lamp in the corner.  
Some pictures are hung  
On the wall. 'That's His Highness,'  
The porter remarks,  
And he points with his finger.  
I look at the picture :  
A warrior covered  
With stars. 'Is he gentle ?'

" 'That's just as you happen 200  
To find him. Why, neighbour,  
The same is with me :  
To-day I'm obliging,  
At times I'm as cross  
As a dog.'

" 'You are dull here,  
Perhaps, little Uncle ?'

" 'Oh no, I'm not dull ;  
I've a task that's exciting :  
Ten years have I fought 210  
With a foe : Sleep his name is.  
And I can assure you  
That when I have taken  
An odd cup of vodka,  
The stove is red hot,  
And the smuts from the candle  
Have blackened the air,  
It's a desperate struggle !'

" 'There's somebody knocking.  
Makhár has gone out ; 220

I am sitting alone now.  
 I go to the door  
 And look out. In the courtyard  
 A carriage is waiting.  
 I ask, 'Is he coming?'  
 'The lady is coming,'  
 The porter makes answer,  
 And hurries away  
 To the foot of the staircase.  
 A lady descends, 230  
 Wrapped in costliest sables,  
 A lackey behind her.  
 I know not what followed  
 (The Mother of God  
 Must have come to my aid),  
 It seems that I fell  
 At the feet of the lady,  
 And cried, 'Oh, protect us!  
 They try to deceive us!  
 My husband—the only 240  
 Support of my children—  
 They've taken away—  
 Oh, they've acted unjustly! . . .

“ ‘Who are you, my pigeon?’ ”

“ My answer I know not,  
 Or whether I gave ore;  
 A sudden sharp pang tore  
 My body in twain.

\* \* \* \* \*

“ I opened my eyes  
 In a beautiful chamber, 250  
 In bed I was laid  
 'Neath a canopy, brothers,

And near me was sitting  
A nurse, in a head-dress  
All streaming with ribbons.  
She's nursing a baby.  
'Who's is it?' I ask her.

" 'It's yours, little Mother.'  
I kiss my sweet child.  
It seems, when I fell 260  
At the feet of the lady,  
I wept so and raved so,  
Already so weakened  
By grief and exhaustion,  
That there, without warning,  
My labour had seized me.  
I bless the sweet lady,  
Elyén Alexándrovna,  
Only a mother  
Could bless her as I do. 270  
She christened my baby,  
Lidórushka called him."

"And what of your husband?"

"They sent to the village  
And started enquiries,  
And soon he was righted.  
Elyén Alexándrovna  
Brought him herself  
To my side. She was tender  
And clever and lovely 280  
And healthy, but childless,  
For God would not grant her  
A child. While I stayed there  
My baby was never  
Away from her bosom.

She tended and nursed him  
Herself, like a mother.  
The spring had set in  
And the birch trees were budding,  
Before she would let us  
Set out to go home. 290

“ Oh, how fair and bright  
In God’s world to-day !  
Clad my heart and gay !

“ Homewards lies our way,  
Near the wood we pause,  
See, the meadows green,  
Hark ! the waters play.  
Rivulet so pure,  
Little child of Spring, 300  
How you leap and sing,  
Rippling in the leaves !  
High the little lark  
Soars above our heads,  
Carols blissfully !  
Let us stand and gaze ;  
Soon our eyes will meet,  
I will laugh to thee,  
Thou wilt smile at me,  
Wee Lidórushka ! 310

“ Look, a beggar comes,  
Trembling, weak, old man,  
Give him what we can.  
‘ Do not pray for us,’  
Let us to him say,  
‘ Father, you must pray  
For Elyénushka,

## THE GOVERNOR'S LADY 269

For tne lady fair,  
Alexándrovna !'

"Look, the church of God!"      320  
Sign the cross we twain  
Time and time again. . .  
'Grant, O blessed Lord,  
Thy most fair reward  
To the gentle heart  
Of Elyénushka,  
Alexándroyna!'

" Green the forest grows,  
 Green the pretty fields,  
 In each dip and dell  
 Bright a mirror gleams.  
 Oh, how fair it is  
 In God's world to-day,  
 Glad my heart and gay !  
 Like the snowy swan  
 O'er the lake I sail,  
 O'er the waving steppes  
 Speeding like the quail.

“ Here we are at home.  
Through the door I fly  
Like the pigeon grey ;  
Low the family  
Bow at sight of me,  
Nearly to the ground,  
Pardon they beseech  
For the way in which  
They have treated me.  
‘ Sit you down,’ I say,  
‘ Do not bow to me.

Listen to my words :  
 You must bow to one  
 Better far than I,  
 Stronger far than I,  
 Sing your praise to her.'

350

“ ‘ Sing to whom,’ you say ?  
 ‘ To Elyénushka,  
 To the fairest soul  
 God has sent on earth :  
 Alexándrovna ! ’ ”

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WOMAN'S LEGEND

Matróna is silent.  
 You see that the peasants  
 Have seized the occasion—  
 They are not forgetting  
 To drink to the health  
 Of the beautiful lady !  
 But noticing soon  
 That Matróna is silent,  
 In file they approach her.

“ What more will you tell us ? ”

10

“ What more ? ” says Matróna,  
 “ My fame as the ‘ lucky one ’  
 Spread through the volost,  
 Since then they have called me  
 ‘ The Governor's Lady.’ ”

You ask me, what further ?

I managed the household,  
And brought up my children.

You ask, was I happy ?

Well, that you can answer  
Yourselves. And my children ? 20

Five sons ! But the peasant's  
Misfortunes are endless :

They've robbed me of one."

She lowers her voice,

And her lashes are trembling,

But turning her head

She endeavours to hide it.

The peasants are rather

Confused, but they linger : 30

" Well, neighbour," they say,

" Will you tell us no more ? "

" There's one thing : You're foolish

To seek among women

For happiness, brothers."

" That's all ? "

" I can tell you

That twice we were swallowed

By fire, and that three times

The plague fell upon us ; 40

But such things are common

To all of us peasants.

Like cattle we toiled,

My steps were as easy

As those of a horse

In the plough. But my troubles

Were not very startling :

No mountains have moved  
From their places to crush me ;  
And God did not strike me 50  
With arrows of thunder.

The storm in my soul  
Has been silent, unnoticed,  
So how can I paint it  
To you ? O'er the Mother  
Insulted and outraged,  
The blood of her first-born  
As o'er a crushed worm  
Has been poured ; and unanswered  
The deadly offences 60

That many have dealt her ;  
The knout has been raised  
Unopposed o'er her body.  
But one thing I never  
Have suffered : I told you  
That Sítnikov died,  
That the last, irreparable  
Shame had been spared me.  
You ask me for happiness ?

Brothers, you mock me ! 70  
Go, ask the official,  
The Minister mighty,  
The Tsar—Little Father,  
But never a woman !

God knows—among women  
Your search will be endless,  
Will lead to your graves.

“ A pious old woman  
Once asked us for shelter ;  
The whole of her lifetime 80  
The Flesh she had conquered



By penance and fasting ;  
 She'd bathed in the Jordan,  
 And prayed at the tomb  
 Of Christ Jesus. She told us  
 The keys to the welfare  
 And freedom of women  
 Have long been mislaid—  
 God Himself has mislaid them  
 And hermits, chaste women, 90  
 And monks of great learning,  
 Have sought them all over  
 The world, but not found them.  
 They're lost, and 'tis thought  
 By a fish they've been swallowed.  
 God's knights have been seeking  
 In towns and in deserts,  
 Weak, starving, and cold,  
 Hung with torturing fetters.  
 They've asked of the seers, 100  
 The stars they have counted  
 To learn ;—but no keys !  
 Through the world they have journeyed ;  
 In underground caverns,  
 In mountains, they've sought them.  
 At last they discovered  
 Some keys. They were precious,  
 But only—not ours.  
 Yet the warriors triumphed .  
 They fitted the lock 110  
 On the fetters of serfdom !  
 A sigh from all over  
 The world rose to Heaven,  
 A breath of relief,  
 Oh, so deep and so joyful !  
 Our keys were still missing. . . .

Great champions, though,  
Till to-day are still searching,  
Deep down in the bed  
Of the ocean they wander, 120  
They fly to the skies,  
In the clouds they are seeking,  
But never the keys.  
Do you think they will find them ?  
Who knows ? Who can say ?  
But I think it is doubtful,  
For which fish has swallowed  
Those treasures so priceless,  
In which sea it swims—  
God Himself has forgotten !” 130

## PART IV.

DEDICATED TO SERGE PETROVITCH BOTKIN

### A FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

#### PROLOGUE

A VERY old willow  
There is at the end  
Of the village of "Earthworms,"  
Where most of the folk  
Have been diggers and delvers  
From times very ancient  
(Though some produced tar).  
This willow had witnessed  
The lives of the peasants :  
Their holidays, dances, 10  
Their communal meetings,  
Their floggings by day,  
In the evening their wooing,  
And now it looked down  
On a wonderful feast.

The feast was conducted  
In Petersburg fashion,  
For Klímka, the peasant

## 276 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

(Our former acquaintance),  
     Had seen on his travels 20  
 Some noblemen's banquets,  
     With toasts and orations,  
 And he had arranged it.

The peasants were sitting  
     On tree-trunks cut newly  
 For building a hut.  
     With them, too, our seven  
 (Who always were ready  
     To see what was passing)  
 Were sitting and chatting 30  
     With Vlass, the old Elder.  
 As soon as they fancied  
     A drink would be welcome.  
 The Elder called out  
     To his son, "Run for Trifon!"  
 With Trifon the deacon,  
     A jovial fellow,  
 A chum of the Elder's,  
     His sons come as well.

Two pupils they are 40  
     Of the clerical college  
 Named Sava and Grisha.  
     The former, the eldest,  
 Is nineteen years old.  
 He looks like a churchman  
     Already, while Grisha  
 Has fine, curly hair,  
     With a slight tinge of red,  
 And a thin, sallow face.  
 Both capital fellows 50  
     They are, kind and simple,

They work with the ploughshare,  
 The scythe, and the sickle,  
 Drink vodka on feast-days,  
 And mix with the peasants  
 Entirely as equals. . . .

The village lies close  
 To the banks of the Volga ;  
 A small town there is  
 On the opposite side. 60  
 (To speak more correctly,  
 There's now not a trace  
 Of the town, save some ashes :  
 A fire has demolished it  
 Two days ago.)

Some people are waiting  
 To cross by the ferry,  
 While some feed their horses  
 (All friends of the peasants).  
 Some beggars have crawled 70  
 To the spot ; there are pilgrims,  
 Both women and men ;  
 The women loquacious,  
 The men very silent.

The old Prince Yutiátin  
 Is dead, but the peasants  
 Are not yet aware  
 That instead of the hayfields  
 His heirs have bequeathed them  
 A long litigation. 80  
 So, drinking their vodka,  
 They first of all argue  
 Of how they'll dispose  
 Of the beautiful hayfields.

You were not all cozened,<sup>1</sup>  
 You people of Russia,  
 And robbed of your land.  
 In some blessed spots  
 You were favoured by fortune !  
 By some lucky chance— 90  
 The Pomyéshchick's long absence,  
 Some slip of posrédnik's,  
 By wiles of the commune,  
 You managed to capture  
 A slice of the forest.  
 How proud are the peasants  
 In such happy corners !  
 The Elder may tap  
 At the window for taxes,  
 The peasant will bluster,— 100  
 One answer has he :  
 " Just sell off the forest,  
 And don't bother me ! "

So now, too, the peasants  
 Of " Earthworms " decided  
 To part with the fields  
 To the Elder for taxes.  
 They calculate closely :  
 " They'll pay both the taxes  
 And dues—with some over, 110  
 Heh, Vlásuchka, won't they ? "

" Once taxes are paid  
 I'll uncover to no man.  
 I'll work if it please me,

<sup>1</sup> A reference to the arranging of terms between the Pomyéshchicks and peasants with regard to land at the time of the emancipation of the serfs.

I'll be with my wife,  
Or I'll go to the tavern."  
"Bravo!" cry the peasants,  
In answer to Klímka,  
"Now, Vlásuchka, do you  
Agree to our plan?"

120

"The speeches of Klímka  
Are short, and as plain  
As the public-house signboard,"  
Says Vlásuchka, joking.  
"And that is his manner:  
To start with a woman  
And end in the tavern."

"Well, where should one end, then?  
Perhaps in the prison?  
Now—as to the taxes,  
Don't croak, but decide."

130

But Vlásuchka really  
Was far from a croaker.  
The kindest soul living  
Was he, and he sorrowed  
For all in the village,  
Not only for one.  
His conscience had pricked him  
While serving his haughty  
And rigorous Barin,  
Obeying his orders,  
So cruel and oppressive.  
While young he had always  
Believed in 'improvements,'  
But soon he observed  
That they ended in nothing,

140

Or worse—in misfortune.

So now he mistrusted  
The new, rich in promise.

The wheels that have passed 150  
O'er the roadways of Moscow  
Are fewer by far

Than the injuries done  
To the soul of the peasant.

There's nothing to laugh at  
In that, so the Elder

Perforce had grown gloomy.  
But now, the gay pranks  
Of the peasants of "Earthworms"

Affected him too. 160

His thoughts became brighter :  
No taxes . . . no barschin . . .

No stick held above you,  
Dear God, am I dreaming ?

Old Vlásuchka smiles. . . .  
A miracle surely !

Like that, when the sun  
From the splendour of Heaven  
May cast a chance ray

In the depths of the forest : 170

The dew shines like diamonds,  
The mosses are gilded.

" Drink, drink, little peasants !  
Disport yourselves bravely ! "

'Twas gay beyond measure.

In each breast awakens

A wondrous new feeling,

As though from the depths  
Of a bottomless gulf

On the crest of a wave, 180



They've been borne to the surface  
To find there awaits them  
A feast without end.

Another pail's started,  
And, oh, what a clamour  
Of voices arises,  
And singing begins.

And just as a dead man's  
Relations and friends  
Talk of nothing but him 190  
Till the funeral's over,  
Until they have finished  
The funeral banquet  
And started to yawn,—  
So over the vodka,  
Beneath the old willow,  
One topic prevails:  
The "break in the chain"  
Of their lords, the Pomyéshchicks.

The deacon they ask, 200  
And his sons, to oblige them  
By singing a song  
Called the "Merry Song" to them

(This song was not really  
A song of the people:  
The deacon's son Grisha  
Had sung it them first.  
But since the great day  
When the Tsar, Little Father,  
Had broken the chains 210  
Of his suffering children,

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They always had danced  
To this tune on the feast-days.  
The " popes " and the house-serfs  
Could sing the words also,  
The peasants could not,  
But whenever they heard it  
They whistled and stamped,  
And the " Merry Song " called it.)

### CHAPTER I

#### BITTER TIMES—BITTER SONGS

##### *The Merry Song*

\* \* \* \* \*

The " Merry Song " finished,  
They struck up a chorus,  
A song of their own,  
A wailing lament  
(For, as yet, they've no others).  
And is it not strange  
That in vast Holy Russia,  
With masses and masses  
Of people unnumbered,  
No song has been born  
Overflowing with joy  
Like a bright summer morning ?  
Yes, is it not striking,  
And is it not tragic ?  
O times that are coming,  
You, too, will be painted  
In songs of the people,

But how? In what colours?  
 And will there be ever  
 A smile in their hearts? 20

"Eh, that's a fine song!  
 'Tis a shame to forget it."

Our peasants regret  
 That their memories trick them.  
 And, meanwhile, the peasants  
 Of "Earthworms" are saying,  
 "We lived but for 'barschin,'  
 Pray, how would you like it?  
 You see, we grew up  
 'Neath the snout of the Barin, 30  
 Our noses were glued  
 To the earth. We'd forgotten  
 The faces of neighbours,  
 Forgot how to speak.  
 We got tipsy in silence,  
 Gave kisses in silence,  
 Fought silently, too."

"Eh, who speaks of silence?  
 We'd more cause to hate it  
 Than you," said a peasant 40  
 Who came from a Volost  
 Near by, with a waggon  
 Of hay for the market.  
 (Some heavy misfortune  
 Had forced him to sell it.)  
 "For once our young lady,  
 Miss Gertrude, decided  
 That any one swearing  
 Must soundly be flogged.  
 Dear Lord, how they flogged us 50  
 Until we stopped swearing!

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Of course, not to swear  
 For the peasant means—silence.  
 We suffered, God knows !  
 Then freedom was granted,  
 We feasted it finely,  
 And then we made up  
 For our silence, believe me :  
 We swore in such style  
 That Pope John was ashamed 60  
 For the church-bells to hear us.  
 (They rang all day long.)  
 What stories we told then !  
 We'd no need to seek  
 For the words. They were written  
 All over our backs."

" A funny thing happened  
 In our parts,—a strange thing,"  
 Remarked a tall fellow  
 With bushy black whiskers. 70  
 (He wore a round hat  
 With a badge, a red waistcoat  
 With ten shining buttons,  
 And stout homespun breeches.  
 His legs, to contrast  
 With the smartness above them,  
 Were tied up in rags !  
 There are trees very like him,  
 From which a small shepherd  
 Has stripped all the bark off 80  
 Below, while above  
 Not a scratch can be noticed !  
 And surely no raven  
 Would scorn such a summit  
 For building a nest.)

“ Well, tell us about it.”

“ I’ll first have a smoke.”

And while he is smoking  
 Our peasants are asking,  
 “ And who is this fellow ?                      90  
 What sort of a goose ? ”

“ An unfortunate footman  
 Inscribed in our Volost,  
 A martyr, a house-serf  
 Of Count Sinégúsin’s.  
 His name is Vikénti.  
 He sprang from the foot-board  
 Direct to the ploughshare ;  
 We still call him ‘ Footman.’  
 He’s healthy enough,                      100  
 But his legs are not strong,  
 And they’re given to trembling.  
 His lady would drive  
 In a carriage, and four  
 To go hunting for mushrooms.  
 He’ll tell you some stories :  
 His memory’s splendid ;  
 You’d think he had eaten  
 The eggs of a magpie.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, setting his hat straight,                      110  
 Vikénti commences  
 To tell them the story.

<sup>1</sup> There is a Russian superstition that a good memory is gained by eating magpies’ eggs.

*The Dutiful Serf—Jacob the Faithful*

Once an official, of rather low family,  
 Bought a small village from bribes he had  
     stored,  
 Lived in it thirty-three years without leaving it,  
     Feasted and hunted and drank like a lord.  
 Greedy and miserly, not many friends he  
     made  
 Sometimes he'd drive to his sister's to tea.  
 Cruel was his nature, and not to his serfs  
     alone :  
 On his own daughter no pity had he,     120  
 Horsewhipped her husband, and drove them  
     both penniless  
 Out of his house ; not a soul dare resist.  
     Jacob, his dutiful servant,  
     Ever of orders observant,  
 Often he'd strike in the mouth with his fist.

Hearts of men born into slavery  
 Sometimes with dogs' hearts accord :  
 Crueller the punishments dealt to them  
 More they will worship their lord.     129

Jacob, it seems, had a heart of that quality,  
 Only two sources of joy he possessed :  
 Tending and serving his Barin devotedly,  
     Rocking his own little nephew to rest.  
 So they lived on till old age was approaching  
     them,  
 Weak grew the legs of the Barin at last,  
 Vainly, to cure them, he tried every remedy ;  
 Feast and debauch were delights of the past.

Plump are his hands and white,  
 Keen are his eyes and bright,  
 Rosy his cheek remains, 140  
 But on his legs—are chains !

Helpless the Barin now lies in his dressing-gown,

Bitterly, bitterly cursing his fate.  
 Jacob, his, "brother and friend,"—so the Barin says,—

Nurses him, humours him early and late.  
 Winter and summer they pass thus in company,  
 Mostly at card-games together they play,  
 Sometimes they drive for a change to the sister's house,

Eight miles or so, on a very fine day.  
 Jacob himself bears his lord to the carriage then, 150

Drives him with care at a moderate pace,  
 Carries him into the old lady's drawing-room. . . .

So they live peacefully on for a space.

Grisha, the nephew of Jacob, a youth becomes,  
 Falls at the feet of his lord : "I would wed."

"Who will the bride be?" "Her name is Arisha, sir."

Thunders the Barin, "You'd better be dead!"

Looking at her he had often bethought himself;  
 "Oh, for my legs! Would the Lord but  
 - relent!" 159

So, though the uncle entreated his clemency,  
 Grisha to serve in the army he sent.

Cut to the heart was the slave by this tyranny,  
Jacob the Faithful went mad for a spell :  
Drank like a fish, and his lord was disconsolate,  
No one could please him : " You fools, go  
to Hell ! "

Hate in each bosom since long has been  
festering :

Now for revenge ! Now the Barin must pay,  
Roughly they deal with his whirrs and in-  
firmities,

Two quite unbearable weeks pass away.  
Then the most faithful of servants appeared  
again,

Straight at the feet of his master he fell,<sup>170</sup>  
Pity has softened his heart to the legless one,  
Who can look after the Barin so well ?

" Barin, recall not your pitiless cruelty,  
While I am living my cross I'll embrace."  
Peacefully now lies the lord in his dressing-  
gown,

Jacob, once more, is restored to his place.  
Brother again the Pomyéshchick has christened  
him.

" Why do you wince, little Jacob ? " says he.  
" Barin, there's something that stings . . . in  
my memory. . . ."<sup>180</sup>

Now they thread mushrooms, play cards,  
and drink tea,  
Then they make brandy from cherries and  
raspberries,

Next for a drive to the sister's they start,  
See how the Barin lies smoking contentedly,  
Green leaves and sunshine have gladdened  
his heart.

Jacob is gloomy, converses unwillingly,



Trembling his fingers, the reins are hung  
 slack,  
 "Spirits unholy!" he murmurs unceasingly,  
 "Leave me! Begone!" (But again they  
 attack.)

Just on the right lies a deep, wooded precipice,  
 Known in those parts as "The Devil's  
 Abyss,"

191

Jacob turns into the wood by the side of it.

Queries his lord, "What's the meaning of  
 this?"

Jacob replies not. The path here is difficult,  
 Branches and ruts make their steps very slow;  
 Rustling of trees is heard. Spring waters  
 noisily

Cast themselves into the hollow below.

Then there's a halt,—not a step can the horses  
 move:

Straight in their path stand the pines like  
 a wall;

Jacob gets down, and, the horses unharnessing,  
 Takes of the Barin no notice at all.

201

Vainly the Barin's exclaiming and questioning,  
 Jacob is pale, and he shakes like a leaf,  
 Evilly smiles at entreaties and promises:

"Am I a murderer, then, or a thief?"

No, Barin, *you* shall not die. There's another  
 way!"

Now he has climbed to the top of a pine,  
 Fastened the reins to the summit, and crossed  
 himself,

Turning his face to the sun's bright decline.  
 Thrusting his head in the noose . . . he has  
 hanged himself!

210

Horrible ! Horrible ! See, how he sways  
Backwards and forwards. . . . The Barin,  
unfortunate,  
Shouts for assistance, and struggles and  
prays.  
Twisting his head he is jerking convulsively,  
Straining his voice to the utmost he cries,  
All is in vain, there is no one to rescue him,  
Only the mischievous echo replies.

Gloomy the hollow now lies in its winding-  
sheet,  
Black is the night. Hear the owls on the  
wing,  
Striking the earth as they pass, while the horses  
stand 220  
Chewing the leaves, and their bells faintly  
ring.  
Two eyes are burning like lamps at the train's  
approach,  
Steadily, brightly they gleam in the night,  
Strange birds are flitting with movements  
mysterious,  
Somewhere at hand they are heard to alight.  
Straight over Jacob a raven exultingly  
Hovers and caws. Now a hundred fly round !  
Feebly the Barin is waving his crutch at them,  
Merciful Heaven, what horrors abound !

So the poor Barin all night in the carriage lies,  
Shouting, from wolves to protect his old  
bones. 231  
Early next morning a hunter discovers him,  
Carries him home, full of penitent groans :

“ Oh, I’m a sinner most infamous ! Punish me ! ”

Barin, I think, till you rest in your grave,  
One figure surely will haunt you incessantly,  
Jacob the Faithful, your dutiful slave.

“ What sinners ! What sinners ! ”

The peasants are saying,

“ I’m sorry for Jacob, 240

Yet pity the Barin,

Indeed he was punished ! ‘ ‘

Ah, me ! ” Then they listen

To two or three more tales

As strange and as fearful,

And hotly they argue

On who must be reckoned

The greatest of sinners :

“ The publican,” one says,

And one, “ The Pomyéshchick,” 250

Another, “ The peasant.”

This last was a carter,

A man of good standing

And sound reputation,

No ignorant babbler.

He’d seen many things

In his life, his own province

Had traversed entirely.

He should have been heard.

The peasants, however, 260

Were all so indignant

They would not allow him

To speak. As for Klímka,

His wrath is unbounded,

“ You fool ! ” he is shouting.

“ But let me explain.”

" I see you are *all* fools,"  
 A voice remarks roughly :  
 The voice of a trader  
 Who squeezes the peasants 270  
 For laputs or berries  
 Or any spare trifles.  
 But chiefly he's noted  
 For seizing occasions  
 When taxes are gathered,  
 And peasants' possessions  
 Are bartered at auction.  
 " You start a discussion  
 And miss the chief point.  
 Why, who's the worst sinner ? 280  
 Consider a moment."

" Well, who then ? You tell us."  
 " The robber, of course."  
 " You've not been a serf, man,"  
 Says Klímka in answer ;  
 " The burden was heavy,  
 But not on your shoulders.  
 Your pockets are full,  
 So the robber alarms you ;  
 The robber with this case 290  
 Has nothing to do."

" The case of the robber  
 Defending the robber,"  
 The other retorts.

" Now, pray ! " bellows Klímka,  
 And leaping upon him,  
 He punches his jaw

The trader repays him  
With buffets as hearty,  
"Take leave of your carcase !" 300  
He roars.

"Here's a tussle !"  
The peasants are clearing  
A space for the battle ;  
They do not prevent it  
Nor do they applaud it  
The blows fall like hail.

"I'll kill you, I'll kill you !  
Write home to your parents !"

"I'll kill you, I'll kill you ! 310  
Heh, send for the pope !"

The trader, bent double  
By Klímka, who, clutching  
His hair, drags his head down,  
Repeating, "He's bowing !"  
Cries, "Stop, that's enough !"  
When Klímka has freed him  
He sits on a log,  
And says, wiping his face  
With a broadly-checked muffler, 320  
"No wonder he conquered :  
He ploughs not, he reaps not,  
Does nothing but doctor  
The pigs and the horses ;  
Of course he gets strong !"

The peasants are laughing,  
And Klímka says, mocking,  
"Here, try a bit more !"

## 294 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

“Come on, then ! I’m ready,”  
The trader says stoutly, 330  
And rolling his sleeves up,  
He spits on his palms.

“The hour has now sounded  
For me, though a sinner,  
To speak and unite you,”  
Ióna pronounces.  
The whole of the evening  
That diffident pilgrim  
Has sat without speaking,  
And crossed himself, sighing. 340  
The trader’s delighted,  
And Klímka replies not.  
The rest, without speaking,  
Sit down on the ground.

## CHAPTER II

### PILGRIMS AND WANDERERS

We know that in Russia  
Are numbers of people  
Who wander at large  
Without kindred or home.  
They sow not, they reap not,  
They feed at the fountain  
That’s common to all,  
That nourishes likewise  
The tiniest mouse  
And the mightiest army: 10  
The sweat of the peasant.

The peasants will tell you  
 That whole populations  
 Of villages sometimes  
 Turn out in the autumn  
 To wander like pilgrims.  
 They beg, and esteem it  
 A paying profession.  
 The people consider  
 , That misery drives them 20  
 More often than cunning,  
 And so to the pilgrims  
 Contribute their mite.  
 Of course, there are cases  
 Of downright deception :  
 One pilgrim's a thief,  
 Or another may wheedle  
 Some cloth from the wife  
 Of a peasant, exchanging  
 Some " sanctified wafers " 30  
 Or " tears of the Virgin "  
 He's brought from Mount Athos,  
 And then she'll discover  
 He's been but as far  
 As a cloister near Moscow.  
 One saintly old greybeard  
 Enraptured the people  
 By wonderful singing,  
 And offered to teach  
 The young girls of the village 40  
 The songs of the church  
 With their mothers' permission.  
 And all through the winter  
 He locked himself up  
 With the girls in a stable.  
 From thence, sometimes singing

## 296 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Was heard, but more often  
 Came laughter and giggles.  
 Well, what was the upshot ?  
 He taught them no singing, 50  
 But ruined them all.

Some Masters so skilful  
 There are, they will even  
 Lay siege to the ladies.  
 They first to the kitchens  
 Make sure of admission,  
 And then through the maids  
 Gained access to the mistress.  
 See, there he goes, strutting  
 Along through the courtyard 60

And jingling the keys  
 Of the house like a Barin.  
 And soon he will spit  
 In the teeth of the peasants ;  
 The pious old women,  
 Who always before  
 At the house have been welcome,  
 He'll speedily banish.

The people, however,  
 Can see in these pilgrims 70  
 A good side as well.

For, who begs the money  
 For building the churches ?  
 And who keeps the convent's  
 Collecting-box full ?

And many, though useless,  
 Are perfectly harmless ;  
 But some are uncanny,  
 One can't understand them :  
 The people know Fóma, 80



With chains round' his middle  
 Some six stones in weight ;  
 How summer and winter  
 He walks about barefoot,  
 And constantly mutters  
 Of Heaven knows what.  
 His life, though, is godly :  
 A stone for his pillow,  
 A crust for his dinner.

The people know also 90  
 The old man, Nikífor,  
 Adherent, most strange,  
 Of the sect called "The Hiders."  
 One day he appeared  
 In Usólovo village  
 Upbraiding the people  
 For lack of religion,  
 And calling them forth  
 To the great virgin forest  
 To seek for salvation. 100  
 The chief of police  
 Of the district just happened  
 To be in the village  
 And heard his oration :  
 " Ho ! Question the madman ! "

" Thou foe of Christ Jesus !  
 Thou Antichrist's herald ! "  
 Nikífor retorts.  
 The Elders are nudging him :  
 " Now, then, be silent ! " 110  
 He pays no attention.  
 They drag him to prison.  
 He stands in the waggon,

## 258 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Undauntedly chiding  
The chief of police,  
And loudly he cries  
To the people who follow him .

“ Woe to you ! Woe to you ! Bondsmen, I  
mourn for you !  
Though you're in rags, e'en the rags shall be  
torn from you !  
Fiercely with knouts in the past did they  
mangle you : 120  
Clutches of iron in the future will strangle  
you ! ”

The people are crossing  
Themselves. The Nachálnik <sup>1</sup>  
Is striking the prophet :  
“ Remember the Judge  
Of Jerusalem, sinner ! ”  
The driver's so frightened  
The reins have escaped him,  
His hair stands on end. . . .

And when will the people 130  
Forget Yevressína,  
Miraculous widow ?  
Let cholera only  
Break out in a village :  
At once like an envoy  
Of God she appears.  
She nurses and fosters  
And buries the peasants.  
The women adore her,  
They pray to her almost. 140

<sup>1</sup> Chief of Police.

It's evident, then,  
 That the door of the peasant  
 Is easily opened :  
 Just knock, and be certain  
 He'll gladly admit you.  
 He's never suspicious  
 Like wealthier people ;  
 The thought does not strike him  
 At sight of the humble  
 And destitute stranger, 150  
 " Perhaps he's a thief ! "  
 And as to the women,  
 They're simply delighted,  
 They'll welcome you warmly.

At night, in the Winter,  
 The family gathered  
 To work in the cottage  
 By light of " luchina," <sup>1</sup>  
 Are charmed by the pilgrim's  
 Remarkable stories. 160  
 He's washed in the steam-bath,  
 And dipped with his spoon  
 In the family platter,  
 First blessing its contents.  
 His veins have been thawed  
 By a streamlet of vodka,  
 His words flow like water.  
 The hut is as silent  
 As death. The old father  
 Was mending the laputs, 170  
 But now he has dropped them.

<sup>1</sup> A wooden splinter prepared and used for lighting purposes.

## 300 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

The song of the shuttle  
 Is hushed, and the woman  
 Who sits at the wheel  
 Is engrossed in the story.  
 The daughter, Yevgénka,  
 Her plump little finger  
 Has pricked with a needle.  
 The blood has dried up,  
 But she notices nothing,; 180  
 Her sewing has fallen,  
 Her eyes are distended,  
 Her arms hanging limp.  
 The children, in bed  
 On the sleeping-planks, listen,  
 Their heads hanging down.  
 They lie on their stomachs  
 Like snug little seals  
 Upon Archangel ice-blocks.  
 Their hair, like a curtain, 190  
 Is hiding their faces :  
 It's, yellow, of course !

But wait. Soop the pilgrim  
 Will finish his story—  
 (It's true)—from Mount Athos.  
 It tells how that sinner  
 The Turk had once driven  
 Some monks in rebellion  
 Right into the sea,—  
 Who meekly submitted, 200  
 And perished in hundreds.

(What murmurs of horror  
 Arise ! Do you notice  
 The eyes, full of tears ?)

And now comes the climax,  
 The terrible moment,  
 And even the mother  
 Has loosened her hold  
 On the corpulent bobbin,  
 It rolls to the ground. . . . 210  
 And see how cat Vaska  
 At once becomes active  
 And pounces upon it.  
 At times less enthralling,  
 The antics of Vaska  
 Would meet their deserts ;  
 But now he is patting  
 And touching the bobbin  
 And leaping around it  
 With flexible movements, 220  
 And no one has noticed.  
 It rolls to a distance,  
 The thread is unwound.

Whoever has witnessed  
 The peasant's delight  
 At the tales of the pilgrims  
 Will realise this :  
 Though never so crushing  
 His labours and worries,  
 Though never so pressing 230  
 The call of the tavern,  
 Their weight will not deaden  
 The soul of the peasant  
 And will not benumb it.  
 The road that's before him  
 Is broad and unending. . . .  
 When old fields, exhausted,  
 Play false to the reaper,

## 302 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

He'll seek near the forest  
 For soil more productive. 240  
 The work may be hard,  
 But the new plot repays him :  
 It yields a rich harvest  
 Without being manured.  
 A soil just as fertile  
 Lies hid in the soul  
 Of the people of Russia ;  
 O Sower, then come !

The pilgrim Ióna  
 Since long is well known , 250  
 In the village of " Earthworms."  
 The peasants contend  
 For the honour of giving  
 The holy man shelter.  
 At last, to appease them,  
 He'd say to the women,  
 " Come, bring out your icons !"  
 They'd hurry to fetch them.  
 Ióna, prostrating  
 Himself to each icon, 260  
 Would say to the people,  
 " Dispute not ! Be patient,  
 And God will decide :  
 The saint who looks kindest  
 At me I will follow."  
 And often he'd follow  
 The icon most poor  
 To the lowest hovel.  
 That hut would become then  
 A Cup overflowing ; 270  
 The women would run there

With baskets and saucepans,  
All thanks to Ióna.

And now, without hurry  
Or noise, he's beginning  
To tell them a story,  
"Two Infamous Sinners,"  
But first, most devoutly,  
He crosses himself.

• •

*Two Infamous Sinners*

Come, let us praise the Omnipotent ! 280

Let us the legend relate  
Told by a monk in the Priory.  
Thus did I hear him narrate :

Once were twelve brigands notorious,  
One, Kudeár, at their head ;  
Torrents of blood of good Christians  
Foully the miscreants shed.

Deep in the forest their hiding-place,  
Rich was their booty and rare ;  
Once Kudeár from near Kiev Town 290  
Stole a young maiden most fair.

Days Kudeár with his mistress spent,  
Nights on the road with his horde ;  
Suddenly, conscience awoke in him,  
Stirred by the grace of the Lord.

Sleep left his couch. Of iniquity  
Sickened his spirit at last ;  
Shades of his victims appeared to him,  
Crowding in multitudes vast.

## 304 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Long was this monster most obdurate,      300  
Blind to the light from above,  
Then flogged to death his chief satellite,  
Cut off the head of his love,—

Scattered his gang in his penitence,  
And to the churches of God  
All his great riches distributed,  
Buried his knife in the sod,

Journeyed on foot to the Sepulchre,  
Filled with repentance and grief;  
Wandered and prayed, but the pilgrimage  
Brought to his soul no relief.      311

When he returned to his Fatherland  
Clad like a monk, old and bent,  
'Neath a great oak, as an anchorite,  
Life in the forest he spent.      "

There, from the Maker Omnipotent,  
Grace day and night did he crave :  
" Lord, though my body thou castigate,  
Grant that my soul I may save ! "

Pity had God on the penitent,      320  
Showed him the pathway to take,  
Sent His own messenger unto him  
During his prayers, who thus spake :

" Know, for this oak sprang thy preference,  
Not without promptings divine ;  
Lo ! take the knife thou hast slaughtered with,  
Fell it, and grace shall be thine.



“ Yea, though the task prove laborious,  
Great shall the recompense be,  
Let but the tree fall, and verily 330  
Thou from thy load shalt be free.”

Vast was the giant's circumference ;  
Praying, his task he begins,  
Works with the tool of atrociousness,  
Offers amends for his sins.

Glory he sang to the Trinity,  
Scraped the hard wood with his blade.  
Years passed away. Though he tarried not,  
Slow was the progress he made.

'Gainst such a mighty antagonist 340  
How could he hope to prevail ?  
Only a Samson could vanquish it,  
Not an old man, spent and frail.

Doubt, as he worked, began plaguing him :  
Once of a voice came the sound,  
“ Heh, old man, say what thy purpose is ? ”  
Crossing himself he looked round.

There, Pan <sup>1</sup> Glukhóvsky was watching him  
On his brave Arab astride,  
Rich was the Pan, of high family, 350  
Known in the whole countryside.

Many cruel deeds were ascribed to him,  
Filled were his subjects with hate,  
So the old hermit to caution him  
Told him his own sorry fate. :

<sup>1</sup> Polish title for nobleman or gentleman.

## 306 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

“ Ho ! ” laughed Glukhóvsky, derisively,  
“ Hope of salvation’s not mine ;  
These are the things that I estimate—  
Women, gold, honour, and wine.

“ My life, old man, is the only one ;                    360  
Many the serfs that I keep ;  
What though I waste, hang, and torture them—  
You should but see how I sleep ! ”

Lo ! to the hermit, by miracle,  
Wrath a great strength did impart,  
Straight on Glukhóvsky he flung himself,  
Buried the knife in his heart.

Scarce had the Pan, in his agony,  
Sunk to the blood-sodden ground,  
Crashed the great tree, and lay subjugate,  
Trembled the earth at the sound.                    371

Lo ! and the sins ‘ of the anchorite  
Passed from his soul like a breath.  
“ Let us pray God to incline to us,  
Slaves in the shadow of Death. . . . ”

## CHAPTER III

### OLD AND NEW

Ióna has finished.  
He crosses himself,  
And the people are silent.  
And then of a sudden

The trader cries loudly  
 In great irritation,  
 "What's wrong with the ferry ?  
 A plague on the sluggards !  
 Ho, ferry ahoy ! "

" You won't get the ferry 10  
 Till sunrise, for even  
 In daytime they're frightened  
 • To cross : the boat's rotten !  
 About Kudeár, now—" • •

" Ho, ferry ahoy ! "

He strides to his waggon.  
 A cow is there tethered ;  
 He churlishly kicks her.  
 His hens begin clucking ;  
 He shouts at them, " Silence ! " 20  
 The calf, which is shifting  
 About in the cart, •  
 Gets a crack on the forehead.  
 He strikes the roan mare  
 With the whip, and departing  
 He makes for the Volga.  
 The moon is now shining,  
 It casts on the roadway  
 A comical shadow,  
 Which trots by his side. 30

" Oho ! " says the Elder,  
 " He thought himself able  
 To fight, but discussion  
 Is not in his line. . . .  
 My brothers, how grievous  
 The sins of the nobles ! "

## 308 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

“ And yet nòt as great  
 As the sin of the peasant,”  
 The carter cannot here  
 Refrain from remarking. 40

“ A plaguey old croaker ! ”  
 Says Klím, spitting crossly ;  
 “ Whatever arises  
 The raven must fly  
 To his own little brood !  
 What is it, then, tell us,  
 The sin of the peasant ? ”

### *The Sin of Gleb the Peasant*

A'miral Widower sailed on the sea,  
 Steering his vessels a-sailing went he. 49  
 Once with the Turk a great battle he fought,  
 His was the victory, gallantly bought.  
 So to the hero as valour's reward  
 Eight thousand souls<sup>1</sup> did the Empress  
 award.

A'miral Widower lived on his land  
 Rich and content, till his end was at hand  
 As he lay dying this A'miral bold  
 Handed his Elder a casket of gold.  
 “ See that thou cherish this casket,” he said,  
 “ Keep it and open it when I am dead.  
 There lies my will, and by it you will see  
 Eight thousand souls are from serfdom set  
 free.” 61

Dead, on the table, the A'miral lies,  
 A kinsman remote to the funeral lies.

<sup>1</sup> Serfs

Buried ! Forgotten ! His relative soon  
 Calls Gleb, the Elder, with him to commune.  
 And, in a trice, by his cunning and skill,  
 Learns of the casket, and terms of the will.  
 Offers him riches and bliss unalloyed,  
 Gives him his freedom,—the will is destroyed !  
 Thus, by Gleb's longing for criminal gains,  
 Eight thousand souls were left rotting in  
     chains, 71  
 Aye, and their sons and their grandsons as well,  
 Think, what a crowd were thrown back into  
     Hell !

God forgives all. Yes, but Judas's crime  
 Ne'er will be pardoned till end of all time.  
 Peasant, most infamous sinner of all,  
 Endlessly grieve to atone for thy fall !

Wrathful, relentless,  
 The carter thus finished  
 The tale of the peasant 80  
 In thunder-like tones.  
 The others sigh deeply •  
 And rise. ' They're exclaiming,  
 " So, that's what it is, then,  
     The sin of the peasant.  
 He's right. 'Tis indeed  
     A most terrible sin ! "

" The story speaks truly ;  
 Our grief shall be endless,  
 Ah, me ! " says the Elder. 90  
 (His faith in improvements  
 Has vanished again.)  
 And Klímka, who always  
 Is swayed in an instant •  
     By joy or by sorrow,

# 316 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Despondingly echoes,  
 "A terrible sin !"

The green by the Volga,  
 Now flooded with moonlight,  
 Has changed of a sudden : 100  
 The peasants no longer  
 Seem men independent  
 With self-assured movements,  
 They're "Earthworms" again—  
 Those "Earthworms" whose victuals  
 Are never sufficient,  
 Who always are threatened  
 With drought, blight, or famine,  
 Who yield to the trader  
 The fruits of extortion, 110  
 Their tears, shed in tar.  
 The miserly haggler  
 Not only ill-pays them, '  
 But bullies 'as well :  
 "For what do I pay you ?  
 The tar costs you nothing.  
 The sun brings it cozing  
 From out of your bodies  
 As though from a pine."

Again the poor peasants 120  
 Are sunk in the depths  
 Of the bottomless gulf !  
 Dejected and silent,  
 They lie on their stomachs  
 Absorbed in reflection.  
 But then they start singing ;  
 And slowly the song,  
 Like a ponderous cloud-bank,

## THE HUNGRY ONE

311

Rolls mournfully onwards.

They sing it so clearly      130  
That quickly our seven  
Have learnt it as well.

### *The Hungry One*

The peasant stands  
With haggard gaze,  
He pants for breath,  
He reels and sways ;

From famine food,  
From bread of bark,  
His form has swelled,  
His face is dark.      140

Through endless grief  
Suppressed and dumb  
His eyes are glazed,  
His soul is numb.

As though in sleep,  
With footsteps slow,  
He creeps to where  
The rye doth grow.

Upon his field  
He gazes long,      150  
He stands and sings  
A voiceless song :

“ Grow ripe, grow ripe,  
O Mother rye,  
I fostered thee, •  
Thy lord am I.

## 312 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

“ Yield me a loaf  
Of monstrous girth,  
A cake as vast  
As Mother-Earth.

160

“ I’ll eat the whole—  
No crumb I’ll spare ;  
With wife, with child,  
I will not share.”

“ Eh, brothers, I’m hungry ! ”  
A voice exclaims feebly.  
It’s one of the peasants.  
He fetches a loaf  
From his bag, and devours it.

“ They sing without voices,  
And yet when you listen  
Your hair begins rising,”  
Another remarks.

170

It’s true. Not with voices  
They sing of the famine—  
But something within them.  
One, during the singing,  
Has risen, to show them  
The gait of the peasant  
Exhausted by hunger,  
And swayed by the wind.  
Restrained are his movements  
And slow. After singing  
“ The Hungry One,” thirsting  
They make for the bucket,  
One after another  
Like geese in a file.  
They stagger and totter

180



As people half-famished, ,  
A drink will restore them. 190

"Come, let us be joyful!"

The deacon is saying.

His youngest son, Grísha,

Approaches the peasants.

"Some vodka?" they ask him.

"No, thank you. I've had some.

But what's been the matter?

You look like drowned kittens."

"What should be the matter?"

(And making an effort 200

They bear themselves bravely.)

And Vlass, the old Elder,

Has placed his great palm

On the head of his godson.

"Is serfdom revived?

Will they drive you to barschin

Or pilfer your hayfields?"

Says Grísha in jest.

"The hay-fields? You're joking!"

"Well, what has gone wrong, then?

And why were you singing 211

'The Hungry One,' brothers?

To summon the famine?"

"Yes, what's all the pother?"

Here Klímka bursts out

Like a cannon exploding.

The others are scratching

## 314 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Then necks, and reflecting :  
 " It's true ! What's amiss ? "  
 " Come, drink, little ' Earthworms,'  
 Come, drink and be merry !     221  
 All's well—as we'd have it,  
 Aye, just as we wished it.  
 Come, hold up your noddles !  
 But what about Gleb ? "

A lengthy discussion  
 ' Ensues ; and it's settled  
 That they're not to blame  
 For the deed of the traitor :  
 'Twas serfdom's the fault.     230  
 For just as the big snake  
 Gives birth to the small ones,  
 So serfdom gave birth  
 To the sins of the nobles,  
 To Jacob the Faithful's ,  
 And also to Gleb's.  
 For, see, without serfdom  
 Had been no Pomyéshchick  
 To drive his true sérvant  
 To death by the noose,     240  
 No terrible vengeance  
 Of slave upon master  
 By suicide fearful,  
 No treacherous Gleb.

'Twas Prov of all others  
 Who listened to Grísha  
 With deepest attention  
 And joy most apparent.  
 And when he had finished  
 He cried to the others     250  
 In accents of triumph,

Delightedly smiling,  
“ Now, brothers, mark *that* ! ”  
“ So now, there’s an end  
Of ‘ The Hungry One,’ peasants ! ”  
Cries Klímka, with glee.  
The words about serfdom  
Were quickly caught up  
By the crowd, and went passing  
From one to another : 260  
“ Yes, if there’s no big snake  
There cannot be small ones ! ”  
And Klímka is swearing  
Again at the carter :  
“ You ignorant fool ! ”  
They’re ready to grapple !  
The deacon is sobbing  
And kissing his Grísha :  
“ Just see what a headpiece  
The Lord is creating ! 270  
No wonder he longs  
For the college in Moscow ! ”  
Old Vlass, too, is patting  
His shoulder and saying,  
“ May God send thee silver  
And gold, and a healthy  
And diligent wife ! ”

“ I wish not for silver  
Or gold,” replies Grísha.  
“ But one thing I wish : 280  
I wish that my comrades,  
Yes, all the poor peasants  
In Russia so vast,  
Could be happy and free ! ”  
Thus, earnestly speaking,

## 316 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

And blushing as shyly  
 As any young maiden,  
 He walks from their midst.

The dawn is approaching.  
 The peasants make ready 290  
 To cross by the ferry.  
 "Eh, Vlass," says the carter,  
 As, stooping, he raises  
 The span of his harness,  
 "Who's this on the ground?"

The Elder approaches,  
 And Klímka behind him,  
 Our seven as well.  
 (They're always most anxious  
 To see what is passing.) 300

Some fellow is lying  
 Exhausted, dishevelled,  
 Asleep, with the beggars  
 Behind some big logs.  
 His clothing is new,  
 But it's hanging in ribbons.  
 A crimson silk scarf  
 On his neck he is wearing;  
 A watch and a waistcoat;  
 His blouse, too, is red. 310  
 Now Klímka is, stooping  
 To look at the sleeper,  
 Shouts, "Beat him!" and roughly  
 Stamps straight on his mouth.

The fellow springs up,  
 Rubs his eyes, dim with sleep,  
 And old Vlásuchka strikes him.

He squeals like a rat  
'Neath the heel of your slipper,  
And makes for the forest 320  
On long, lanky legs.

Four peasants pursue him,  
The others cry, "Beat him!"  
Until both the man  
And the band of pursuers  
Are lost in the forest.

"Who is he?" our seven  
Are asking the Elder,  
"And why do they beat him?"

"We don't know the reason, 330  
But we have been told  
By the people of Tískov  
To punish this Shútov  
Whenever we catch him,  
And so we obey.  
When people from Tískov  
Pass by, they'll explain it.  
What luck? Did you catch him?"  
He asks of the others  
Returned from the chase. 340

"We caught him, I warrant,  
And gave him a lesson.  
He's run to Demyánsky,  
For there he'll be able  
To cross by the ferry."

"Strange people, to beat him  
Without any cause!"

## 318 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

“ And why ? If the commune  
Has told us to do it  
There must be some reason ! ” 350

Shouts Klím at the seven.  
“ D’you think that the people  
Of Tískov are fools ?

It isn’t long since, mind,  
That many were flogged there,  
One man in each ten.

Ah, Shútov, you rendered  
A dastardly service,  
Your duties are evil,  
You damnable wretch ! 360

And who deserves beating  
As richly as Shútov ?

Not we alone beat him :  
From Tískov, you know,  
Fourteen villages lie  
On the banks of the Volga ;  
I warrant through each  
He’s been driven with blows.”

The seven are silent.  
They’re longing to get 370  
At the root of the matter.

But even the Elder  
Is now growing angry.

It’s daylight. The women  
Are bringing their husbands  
Some breakfast, of rye-cakes  
And—goose ! (For a peasant  
Had driven some geese  
Through the village to market,  
And three were grown weary, 380

And had to be 'carried.)  
 " See here, will you sell them ?  
 They'll die ere you get there."  
 And so, for a trifle,  
 The geese had been bought.

We've often been told  
 How the peasant loves drinking;  
 Not many there are, though,  
 Who know how he eats.  
 He's greedier far 390  
 For his food than for vodka,  
 So one man to-day  
 (A teetotaller mason)  
 Gets perfectly drunk  
 On his breakfast of goose !  
 A shout ! " Who is coming ?  
 Who's this ? " Here's another  
 Excuse for rejoicing  
 And noise ! There's a hay-cart  
 With hay, now approaching, 400  
 And high, on its summit  
 A soldier is sitting.  
 He's known to the peasants  
 For twenty versts round.  
 And, cosy beside him,  
 Justínutchka sits  
 (His niece, and an orphan,  
 His prop in old age).  
 He now earns his living  
 By means of his peep-show, 410  
 Where, plainly discerned,  
 Are the Kremlin and Moscow,  
 While music plays too.  
 The instrument once

## 320 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Had gone wrong, and the soldier,  
 No capital owning,  
 Bought three metal spoons,  
 Which he beat to make music;  
 But the words that he knew  
 Did not suit the new music, 420  
 And folk did not laugh.

The soldier was sly, though :  
 He made some new words up  
 That went with the music.

They hail him with rapture !  
 " Good-health to you, Grandad !  
 Jump down, drink some vodka,  
 And give us some music."

" It's true I got up here,  
 But how to get down ? " 430

" You're going, I see,  
 To the town for your pension,  
 But look what has happened :  
 It's burnt to the ground."

" Burnt down ? Yes, and rightly !  
 What then ? Then I'll go  
 To St. Petersburg for it ;  
 For all my old comrades  
 Are there with their pensions,  
 They'll show me the way." 440

" You'll go by the train, then ? "

The old fellow whistles :  
 " Not long you've been serving  
 Us, orthodox Christians,  
 You, infidel railway !



And welcome you were  
 When you carried us cheaply  
 From Peters to Moscow.  
 (It cost but three roubles.)  
 But now you want seven,  
 So, go to the devil !

450

“ Lady so insolent, lady so arrogant !  
 Hiss like a snake as you glide !  
*Fig for you ! Fig for you ! Fig for you ! Fig*  
*for you !*  
 Puff at the whole countryside !  
 Crushing and maiming your toll you extort,  
 Straight in the face of the peasant you snort,  
 Soon all the people of Russia you may  
 Cleaner than any big broom sweep away ! ”

“ Come, give us some music,”  
 Says Vlass to the soldier,  
 “ For here there are plenty  
 Of holiday people,  
 ’Twill be to your profit.  
 You see to it, Klímka ! ”  
 (Though Vlass doesn’t like him,  
 Whenever there’s something  
 That calls for arranging  
 He leaves it to Klímka :  
 “ You see to it, Klímka ! ”  
 And Klímka is pleased.)

470

And soon the old soldier<sup>3</sup>  
 Is helped from the hay-cart :  
 He’s weak on his legs,—tall,  
 And strikingly thin.  
 His uniform seems

## 322 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

To be hung from a pole ;  
There are medals upon it.

It cannot be said  
That his face is attractive,                      480  
Especially when  
It's distorted by *tic* :  
His mouth opens wide  
And his eyes burn like charcoal,—  
A regular demon !

The music is started,  
The people run back  
From the banks of the Volga.  
He sings to the music.

\*               \*               \*               \*               \*  
A spasm has seized him :                              490  
He leans on his niece,  
And his left leg upraising  
He twirls it around  
In the air like a weight.  
His right follows suit then,  
And murmuring, " Curse it ! "  
He suddenly masters  
And stands on them both.

" You see to it, Klímka ! "  
Of course he'll arrange it                              500  
In Petersburg fashion :  
He stands them together,  
The niece and the uncle ;  
Takes two wooden dishes  
And gives them one each,  
Then springs on a tree-trunk  
To make an oration.

(The soldier can't help  
 Adding apt little words  
 To the speech of the peasant, 510  
 And striking his spoons.)

\* \* \* \*

The soldier is stamping  
 His feet. One can hear  
 His dry bones knock together.  
 When Klímka has finished  
 The peasants come crowding,  
 Surrounding the soldier,  
 And some a kopéck give,  
 And others give half :  
 In no time a rouble 520  
 Is piled on the dishes.

## EPILOGUE

### GRÍSHA DOBROSKLONOW

#### A CHEERFUL SEASON—CHEERFUL SONGS

THE feast was continued  
Till morning—a splendid,  
A wonderful feast !  
Then the people dispersing  
Went home, and our peasants  
Lay down 'neath the willow ;  
Íóna—meek pilgrim  
Of God—slept there too.  
And Sáva and Grísha,  
The sons of the deacon,  
Went home, with their parent  
Unsteady between them.  
They sang ; and their voices,  
Like bells on the Volga,  
So loud and so tuneful,  
Came chiming together :

10

“ Praise to the hero  
Bringing the nation  
Peace and salvation !

## CHEERFUL SEASON

325

“ That which will surely  
Banish the night  
He <sup>1</sup> has awarded—  
Freedom and Light !

20

“ Praise to the hero  
Bringing the nation  
Peace and salvation !

• “ Blessings from Heaven,  
Grace from above,  
Rained on the battle,  
Conquered by Love.

30

“ Little we ask Thee—  
Grant us, O Lord,  
Strength to be honest,  
Fearing Thy word !

• “ Brotherly living,  
Sharing in part,  
That is the roadway  
Straight to the heart.

“ Turn from that teaching  
Tender and wise—  
Cowards and traitors  
Soon will arise.

40

“ People of Russia,  
Banish the night !  
You have been granted  
That which is needful—  
Freedom and Light !

<sup>1</sup> Alexander II., who gave emancipation to the peasants.

The deacon was poor  
 As the poorest of peasants:  
 A mean little cottage 50  
 Like two narrow cages,  
 The one with an oven  
 Which smoked, and the other  
 For use in the summer,—  
 Such was his abode.  
 No horse he possessed  
 And no cow. He had once had  
 A dog and a cat,  
 But they'd both of them left him.  
 His sons put him safely 60  
 To bed, snoring loudly ;  
 Then Sávushka opened  
 A book, while his brother  
 Went out, and away  
 To the fields and the forest.  
 A broad-shouldered youth  
 Was this Grísha ; his face, though,  
 Was terribly thin.  
 In the clerical college  
 The students got little 70  
 To eat. Sometimes Grísha  
 Would lie the whole night  
 Without sleep ; only longing  
 For morning and breakfast,—  
 The coarse piece of bread  
 And the glassful of sbeeten.<sup>1</sup>  
 The village was poor  
 And the food there was scanty,  
 But still, the two brothers

<sup>1</sup> A popular Russian drink composed of hot water and honey

Grew certainly plumper  
 When home for the holidays—  
 Thanks to the peasants.

80

The boys would repay them  
 By all in their power,  
 By work, or by doing  
 Their little commissions  
 In town. Though the deacon  
 Was proud of his children, .  
 He never had given  
 Much thought to their feeding. 90  
 Himself, the poor deacon,  
 Was endlessly hungry,  
 His principal thought  
 Was the manner of getting  
 The next piece of food.  
 He was rather light-minded  
 And vexed himself little ;  
 But Dyómna, his wife,  
 Had been different entirely :  
 She worried and counted, 100  
 So God took her soon.  
 The whole of her life  
 She by salt <sup>1</sup> had been troubled :  
 If bread has run short  
 One can ask of the neighbours ;  
 But salt, which means money,  
 Is hard to obtain.  
 The village with Dyómna  
 Had shared its bread freely ;  
 And long, long ago 110  
 Would her two little children

<sup>1</sup> There was a very heavy tax laid upon salt at the time.

Have lain in the churchyard  
If not for the peasants.

And Dyómna was ready  
To work without ceasing  
For all who had helped her ;  
But salt was her trouble,  
Her thought, ever present  
She dreamt of it, sang of it,  
Sleeping and waking, 120  
While washing, while spinning,  
At work in the fields,  
While rocking her darling  
Her favourite, Grísha.  
And many years after  
The death of his mother,  
His heart would grow heavy  
And sad, when the peasants  
Remember'd one song, '  
And would sing it together 130  
As Dyómna had sung it ;  
They called it " The Salt Song."

### *The Salt Song*

Now none but God  
Can save my son :  
He's dying fast,  
My little one. . . .

I give him bread—  
He looks at it,  
He cries to me,  
" Put salt on it."



I have no salt—  
 No tiny grain ;  
 “ Take flour,” God, whispers,  
 “ Try again. . . .”

He tastes it once,  
 Once more he tries ;  
 “ That’s not enough,  
 More salt ! ” he cries.

The flour again. . . .  
 My tears fall fast 150  
 Upon the bread,—  
 He eats at last !

The mother smiles  
 In pride and joy :  
 Her tears so salt  
 Have saved the boy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Young Grisha remembered  
 This song ; he would sing it  
 Quite low to himself  
 In the clerical college. 160  
 The college was cheerless,  
 And singing this song  
 He would yearn for his mother,  
 For home, for the peasants,  
 His friends and protectors.  
 And soon, with the love  
 Which he bore to his mother,  
 His love for the people  
 Grew wider and stronger. . . .  
 At fifteen years old 170  
 He was firmly decided

To spend his whole life  
     In promoting their welfare,  
 In striving to succour  
     The poor and afflicted.  
 The demon of malice  
     Too long over Russia  
 Has scattered its hate ;  
     The shadow of serfdom  
 Has hidden all paths                   180  
     Save corruption and lying.  
 Another song now  
     Will arise throughout Russia ;  
 The angel of freedom  
     And mercy is flying  
 Unseen o'er our heads,  
     And is calling strong spirits  
 To follow the road  
     Which is honest and clean.  
     Oh, tread not the road                   190  
     So shining and broad :  
     Along it there speed  
     With feverish tread  
     The multitudes led  
     By infamous greed.  
 There lives which are spent  
     With noble intent  
     Are mocked at in scorn ;  
     There souls lie in chains,  
     And bodies and brains                   200  
     By passions are torn,  
     By animal thirst  
     For pleasures accurst  
     Which pass in a breath.

## THE SALT SONG

381

There hope is in vain,  
For there is the reign  
Of darkness and death.

\* \* \* \*

In front of your eyes  
Another road lies—  
'Tis honest and clean.  
Though steep it appears  
And sorrow and tears  
Upon it are seen :

210

It leads to the door  
Of those who are poor,  
Who hunger and thirst,  
Who pant without air,  
Who die in despair—  
Oh, there be the first !

The song of the angel  
Of Mercy not vainly  
Was sung to our Grîsha.  
The years of his study  
Being passed, he developed  
In thought and in feeling ;  
A passionate singer  
Of Freedom became he,  
Of all who are grieving,  
Down-trodden, afflicted,  
In Russia so vast.

220

230

---

The bright sun was shining,  
The cool, fragrant morning  
Was filled with the sweetness  
Of newly-mown hay.

Young Grisha was thoughtful,  
 He followed the first road,  
 He met—~~an~~ an old high-road,  
 An avenue, shaded  
 By tall curling birch trees.  
 The youth was now gloomy, 240  
 Now gay ; the effect  
 Of the feast was still with him ;  
 His thoughts were at work, ••  
 •And in song he expressed them :

“ I know that you suffer,  
 O Motherland dear,  
 The thought of it fills me with woe ;  
 And Fate has much sorrow  
 In store yet, I fear,  
 But you will not perish, I know. 250

“ How long since your children  
 As playthings were used,  
 As slaves to base passions and lust ;  
 Were bartered like cattle,  
 Were vilely abused •  
 By masters most cruel and unjust ?

“ How long since young maidens  
 Were dragged to their shame,  
 Since whistle of whips filled the land,  
 Since ‘ Service ’ possessed 260  
 A more terrible fame  
 Than death by the torturer’s hand ?

“ Enough! It is finished,  
 This tale of the past ;  
 ’Tis ended, the masters’ long sway :

The strength of the people  
Is stirring at last,  
To freedom 'twill point them the way.

“ Your burden grows lighter,  
O Motherland dear, 270  
Your wounds less appalling to see.  
Your fathers were slaves,  
Smitten helpless by fear,  
But, Mother, your children are free ! ”

---

A small winding footpath  
Now tempted young Grisha,  
And guided his steps  
To a very broad hayfield.  
The peasants were cutting  
The hay, and were singing 280  
His favourite song.  
Young Grisha was saddened  
By thoughts of his mother,  
And nearly in anger  
He hurried away  
From the field to the forest.  
Bright echoes are darting  
About in the forest ;  
Like quails in the wheat  
Little children are romping 290  
(The elder ones work  
In the hayfields already).  
He stopped awhile, seeking  
For horse-chestnuts with them.  
The sun was now hot ;  
To the river went Grisha  
To bathe, and he had  
A good view of the ruins

## EPILOGUE

That three days before  
Had been burnt. What a picture !  
No house is left standing ; 301  
And only the prison  
Is saved ; just a few days  
Ago it was whitewashed ;  
It stands like a little  
White cow in the pastures.  
The guards and officials  
Have made it their refuge ;  
But all the poor peasants  
Are strewn by the river 310  
Like soldiers in camp.  
Though they're mostly asleep now,  
A few are astir,  
And two under-officials  
Are picking their way  
To the tent for some vodka  
'Mid tables and cupboards  
And waggons and bundles.  
A tailor approaches  
The vodka tent also ; 320  
A shrivelled old fellow.  
His irons and his scissors  
He holds in his hands,  
Like a leaf he is shaking.  
The pope has arisen  
From sleep, full of prayers.  
He is combing his hair ;  
Like a girl he is holding  
His long shining plait.  
Down the Volga comes floating 330  
Some wood-laden rafts,  
And three ponderous barges  
Are anchored beneath

The right bank of the river.  
 The barge-tower yesterday  
 Evening had dragged them  
 With songs to their places,  
 And there he is standing,  
 The poor harassed man !  
 He is looking quite gay though,      340  
 As if on a holiday,  
 Has a clean shirt on ;  
 Some farthings are jingling  
 Aloud in his pocket.  
 Young Grisha observes him  
 For long from the river,  
 And, half to himself,  
 Half aloud, begins singing :

*The Barge-Tower*

With shoulders back and breast astrain,  
 And bathed in sweat which falls like rain,  
 Through midday heat with gasping song,  
 He drags the heavy barge along.      352  
 He falls and rises with a groan,  
 His song becomes a husky moan. . . .  
 But now the barge at anchor lies,  
 A giant's sleep has sealed his eyes ;  
 And in the bath at break of day  
 He drives the clinging sweat away  
 Then leisurely along the quay  
 He strolls refreshed, and roubles three      36  
 Are sewn into his girdle wide ;  
 Some coppers jingle at his side.  
 He thinks awhile, and then he goes  
 Towards the tavern. There he throws

Some hard-earned farthings on the seat ;  
 He drinks, and revels in the treat,  
 The sense of perfect ease and rest.  
 Soon with the cross he signs his breast :  
 The journey home begins to-day.  
 And cheerfully he goes away ; 370  
 On presents spends a coin or so :  
 For wife some scarlet calico,  
 A scarf for sister, tinsel toys  
 For eager little girls and boys.  
 God guide him home—'tis many a mile—  
 And let him rest a little while. . . .

---

The barge-tower's fate  
 Lead the thoughts of young Grisha  
 To dwell on the whole  
 Of mysterious Russia— 380  
 The fate of her people.  
 For long he was roving  
 About on the bank,  
 Feeling hot and excited,  
 His brain overflowing  
 With new and new verses.

*Russia*

"The Tsar was in mood  
 To dabble in blood :  
 To wage a great war.  
 Shall we have gold enough ? 390  
 Shall we have strength enough ?  
 Questioned the Tsar.



“(Thou art so pitiful  
Poor, and so sorrowful,  
Yet thou art powerful,  
Thy wealth is plentiful,  
Russia, my Mother !)

“ By misery chastened,  
By serfdom of old,  
The heart of thy people,  
O Tsar, is of gold.

400

“ And strong were the nation,  
Unyielding its might,  
If standing for conscience,  
For justice and right.

“ But summon the country  
To valueless strife,  
And no man will hasten  
To offer his life.

“ So Russia lies sleeping  
In obstinate rest ;—  
But should the spark kindle  
That’s hid in her breast—

410

“ She’ll rise without summons,  
Go forth without call,  
With sacrifice boundless,  
Each giving his all !

“ A host she will gather  
Of strength unsurpassed,  
With infinite courage  
Will fight to the last.

420

“ (Thu art so pitiful,  
 Poor, and so sorrowful,  
 Yet of great treasure full,  
 Mighty, all-powerful,  
 Russia, my Mother ! ) ”

Young Grísha was pleased  
 With his song ; and he murmured,  
 “ Its message is true ;  
 I wil sing it to-morrow 43°  
 Aloud to the peasants.

Their songs are so mournful,  
 It's well they should hear  
 Something joyful,—God help them !  
 For just as with running  
 The cheeks begin burning,  
 So acts a good song  
 On the spirit, despairing,  
 Brings comfort and strength.”

But first to 'his brother 44°  
 He sang the new song,  
 And his brother said, “ Splendid ! ”

Then Grísha tried vainly  
 To sleep ; but half dreaming  
 New songs he composed.  
 They grew brighter and stronger. . . .

Our peasants would soon  
 Have been home from their travels  
 If they could have known  
 What was happening to Grísha : 45°  
 With what exaltation  
 His bosom was burning ;  
 What beautiful strains

In his ears began chiming;  
 How blissfully sang the  
 The wonderful anthem  
 Which tells of the freedom  
 And peace of the people.

THE END









